

REFUGEE SUPPORT DEVON



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2022

Introducing RAMP: RSD's new project for Healthcare workers

A rather belated 'Happy New Year' to all our newsletter readers, everybody at RSD sends you our very best wishes for the coming twelve months. For us 2022 has begun in exciting fashion with the start of our new RAMP (Refugees as Medical Professionals) project. RSD's education and employability coordinator Denise Parker explains: "There are many highly-qualified healthcare workers among those seeking refuge in the UK and RAMP is all about finding ways to help them fast-track into their chosen fields in a cost-effective way to fill the many vacancies that currently

exist in the NHS." The project has a wide and ambitious remit, defining 'healthcare professionals' as including doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons, nurses, dental nurses, dieticians, occupational therapists, podiatrists, pharmacists, speech therapists, optometrists and radiographers, but Denise is confident that it starts from a strong basis. "We were successful in helping four Afghan doctors a few years ago," she says. "Three of them now work in their fields in the NHS and the other works as a phlebotomist. In the process we built up a network of connections with local organisations and individuals who are keen to support this project. In fact, the project has had a very enthusiastic reception from many other relevant parties as being invaluable and timely, especially as reinforcements are needed to build up the NHS workforce following 2 years of the pandemic." The pathway into work is far from straightforward. "In general it will involve an exam to prove the client's level of English,



Denise Parker, coordinator of RSD's RAMP project

followed by exams on the content of their profession and a clinical skills exam," Denise explains, "but the exact details will vary for each individual depending on their qualification, work experience, level of English, requirements of the NHS or other professional body." Even after all that the clients will be required to do a six-month internship under supervision in the relevant hospital department, so anyone embarking on this route will be in for the long haul. Denise, however, is undaunted. "RSD is already able to offer preparation for exams which assess clients' general levels of English, like IELTS and OET, through our existing network of volunteer ESOL tutors," she says, "and we recently put out a call for volunteer assistance from healthcare professionals and science teachers through RSD's website and social media pages. The response was really encouraging, people from a wide range of healthcare and science backgrounds got in touch and they are all very keen to assist with the content-specific exams and mentor clients as they transition into the NHS."

Denise anticipates that a regular stream of volunteer assistance will be required as she intends that this will be a long-term project. "We plan to accept 6 - 8 clients initially, probably increasing 50% year on year as we grow," she says. "This is the only such provision in the South-West and we anticipate that there will be strong demand for our services."

Denise will still be very happy to hear from anyone with suitable experience who would like to volunteer on the RAMP project: her e-mail address is education@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk , if you think you can help please drop her a line and tell her a little about yourself and she will send you further information. Thank you!

RSD women's group visit to Crealy

On 27 November RSD's women's group was able to meet for its first 'live' event since early 2020. RSD volunteer Julie Allen reports...

Despite it being a bitterly cold, but thankfully dry day, fun was had by all at the Crealy Theme Park. Eighty-three of us spent the day at Crealy, most travelling by coach, others making their way there directly. The first order of business was to make our way to the big top for the morning showing of The Elves and The Toymaker ice show. Bright lights, loud music and opportunities to sing along to Christmas favourites as well as join in panto style with the performers abounded.

The indoor activities area provided an area for lunch, either indoors or outdoors. Packed lunches of all varieties were produced, including thermos coffee pots - a useful additional means of keeping hands warm cradling a 'mug' of coffee!

The cold was no deterrent to the younger members of the group, as they headed off to enjoy the variety of rides that Crealy had to offer (some more adrenalin pumping than others). For those who wanted a less adventurous experience the woodland area provided a quiet area away from shrieks of delight (or terror?) as did the Victorian carousel, the Safari train ride and the other Christmas activities.



Warming up in the Crealy coffee shop

Buddy and Blossom's Christmas Bash was perfect for young and old alike. Young children were enchanted by the bears, loved the short dance routines, which they could join in with, while their parents enjoyed the selection of well-known Christmas songs, singing along and tapping feet.

Santa's Toy Shop, the only indoor activity (bar the gift shop) was a welcome alternative to being outside. A popular activity area, if the never ending queue of families waiting their time slot to enter, was anything to go by. There was a happy buzz of conversation on the coach on the way back to Exeter. Although there were some sleepy heads!

Julie Allen

Newton Crisis Aid coffee morning

Back in December RSD client Iman (pictured below with her children Kasem and Ibrahim) completed a Food and Hygiene course paid for by Food in Community thanks to Iman's volunteering efforts with them. RSD sought help from the Imam at the South Devon Islamic Organisation who put Iman in touch with a volunteer interpreter to assist her with interpreting the more technical aspects of the day's course. After qualifying Iman cooked for a coffee morning organised by our friends at Newton Crisis Aid. We thought you would like to see the rather mouth-watering results...



Getting to know RSD's trustees - Jenny Longford

Continuing our series of RSD trustee profiles, Jenny Longford (pictured below), chair of the Board, takes her turn under the spotlight.

Jenny's background

I was born and raised in Birmingham. I went to a Grammar School and later did a degree in French and Spanish at Exeter University, followed by a PGCE in which I trained as a French teacher. After I qualified I emigrated to Canada and spent the next four years in or near Vancouver. I did a variety of jobs including working as a French teacher in a school which served the largest indigenous community in British Columbia as well as a logging community up in the mountains. There was no paved road for 60 miles, no TV and it was bitterly cold in the winter. It didn't go well, the nearest French-speaking community was 3000 miles away and the students



were simply too cut off for most of them to relate to other languages. After a year there I returned to Vancouver and taught for two 2 years at Vancouver Free University, an establishment that provided an alternative approach to education. It was around that time that I got into walking, a passion that has remained with me ever since. Eventually I decided Vancouver was too remote from the rest of the world and returned to the UK. I spent the next 30 years in London, working in a variety of jobs including teaching English to speakers of other languages in Tower Hamlets and coordinating English language programmes in Greenwich and Woolwich. I loved working with adults who really wanted to learn. I first encountered refugees though teaching and soon developed an admiration for how they succeeded in rebuilding their lives. There had recently been a coup in Chile and a lot of professional people were being expelled from the country: many of them ended up in Europe or the USA. Together with my then landlord I helped set up a local voluntary welcoming group - the Lewisham Chile Solidarity Committee - and it was through this group that I met my future husband, a Chilean refugee. Sadly we split up after eight years but I have been privileged to visit Chile a number of times, most recently in 2005. My last full-time job was back in Tower Hamlets, managing adult and community ESOL programmes at the College. I retired from that in 2003 and returned to live in Exeter.

Jenny's initial involvement with RSD

I was still doing part-time consultancy when I came back to Exeter and decided to do some voluntary work as well. Exeter was a dispersal city for asylum seekers at that time and RSG (as it was then) was looking for volunteers so it seemed natural for me to gravitate towards them. I started as a drop-in volunteer in March 2005. The drop-in then was 4 days per week and the clients were mainly single males from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. The Afghans had mostly arrived in 2002 so by 2007 they were applying for citizenship and starting to bring their families over. Annette Hughes and Clare Henry set up a 1 to 1 volunteer teaching scheme for the women and I volunteered for that. In 2011 the money to pay for an ESOL coordinator ran out so I took over the role on a voluntary basis. I enjoyed working with the female clients and volunteers, and seeing them improve was very satisfying.

I joined the Board around 2011, initially to speak up for the women's ESOL group, but I got increasingly involved in developing strategy. A couple of years later the Board had no chair and I was persuaded by Annette to take over as 'acting chair'. I am still in the role today.

(continues over the page...)

How Jenny has seen RSD change with time

RSD was much smaller when I started volunteering, Annette (part-time) was the only employee. The first drop-in coordinator - Emma Marshall - was employed, I think, around 2010. By 2013 an administrator was needed so Trupti joined. A year or two later Annette managed to secure funding to pay for an ESOL coordinator. That was good news for me as by then my work with the Board was growing. The Syrian Resettlement Scheme started in 2016 and has been a major focus in the last five years, employing first one then two full-time resettlement coordinators. Since 2014 the trustees have worked at making RSD a more professional organisation on the governance side in particular.

What personal qualities does Jenny think she brings to the Board?

Time, to begin with. I don't see myself as having any special leadership skills - I like to make decisions as a team member, drawing everyone in to best effect - but I have a sense of responsibility and commitment, if a job needs to be done I do it or try to make sure someone else does it. I have taken the time to get to know the staff and the other trustees, and recognise their different skills. I think I'm a good organiser and I value things others do, I don't think of myself as autocratic.

Jenny's thoughts on RSD going forward

Changes in government, policies and the economic situation affect everyone, refugees and the general public alike, so needs will change, but there have always been refugees and there will always be refugees so there will always be a need for RSD. We are looking into new ways to support the integration and enhance the prospects of refugees, for example a medical professionals programme (see the first page), which will help such people into work. Our immigration project is also likely to expand. The proposed changes to current legislation may make it more difficult for asylum seekers to succeed with their claims. Appealing negative decisions is likely to be strictly curtailed. Refugee status will not necessarily be ongoing. As a result increasing numbers of people are likely to come to RSD to apply for indefinite leave to remain. I think it likely that there will be more resettlement schemes. The Syrian resettlement scheme reflects the way government prefers receiving refugees through 'controlled' routes rather than via the asylum route, and RSD will be in the running to coordinate those programmes. But that approach places limitations on numbers and access for people who need to flee their homes is not guaranteed. Some will continue to find their way here by other means.

The external challenges to RSD

The biggest ongoing challenge is to raise funds to continue to provide a good service and meet new demands. RSD is in competition for limited amounts of funding more than ever. We have made strides over the last 12-18 months in terms of publicising RSD and raising media interest, these are areas we need to build on.

Jenny's plans for the future

I have had a very busy year with RSD, the organisation has been through an exceptionally rocky time and faced lots of challenges over the last eight months. I would like to reduce the amount of time I've been spending on RSD business as I need to sort the house and garden out, and want to do more walking and travel.

How Jenny thinks working with RSD has benefitted her personally

In a word: connection. The relationships I have formed with the staff, volunteers, clients and other trustees contribute a lot to my life and I really do value this. Besides, being part of RSD makes me feel part of the community life in the city and gives me a sense of doing something worthwhile.

Our thanks to Jenny for the time she gave to this interview and also for everything she has done for us during her long association with RSD. Interviews with other trustees, staff members and volunteers will follow in future newsletters.

Nationality and Borders Bill rally on Saturday, 19 February

RSD representatives will be participating in a rally against the Nationality and Borders Bill (NABB) to be held at mid-day on Saturday, 19 February. RSD Trustee Anna Camilleri tells us more...

The rally is being organised by a coalition of local organisations and aims to raise awareness on both the NABB and the policing bill which are going through the House of Lords. RSD's Chair of Trustees Jenny Longford and Casework Coordinator Neli Montes De Oca will be speaking at the event.

The NABB will have many negative impacts, including:

- It will criminalise and detain the vast majority of those fleeing war and persecution who seek asylum here.
- It effectively ends the right to asylum and settlement in the UK, undermining 70 years of international law and co-operation under the UN Refugee Convention.
- It will potentially further endanger lives and leave more refugees here facing destitution.
- There are currently almost no 'safe' or 'authorised' routes people can take to travel to the UK to claim asylum. This Bill does not introduce any new safe routes and further restricts family reunion rights. Nor is there any global resettlement target set for how many refugees the UK will resettle.

We ask all RSD's friends and followers to support this rally and stand against the NABB.

Anna Camilleri

Further information is given in the flyer below. Please share the date and time with your networks and ask them to visit the event's page, <https://fb.me/e/14WRbUDou> .

Thank you!

The #Anti-Refugee Bill will punish refugees- not protect them

RALLY Stand Against
The Nationality and Borders Bill (NABB)
and PCSC Bill
Sat. 19th Feb. at 12.00 Bedford Sq. Exeter

Join groups working with and for refugees in Exeter at the Rally and **SAY**

- NO to:** *Criminalising the vast majority of asylum seekers arriving in the UK.
*Withdrawing their rights to Protection, Family Reunion and Support.
*Extending inhumane detention both here and offshore.
*Allowing ministers to revoke people's British Citizenship without notice.



+ many others

Rally Organised by Exeter Stop the War Coalition

Fundraising special - Betsy's swimming challenge

At the end of January we were very pleasantly surprised to receive the following message:

“A new fundraising page has been created in aid of Refugee Support Devon through TotalGiving™. This page can be seen at www.totalgiving.co.uk/mypage/betsysswimchallenge.”

We clicked on the link and read the following:

Hello, I am Betsy and I am 8 years old. I am doing a swim challenge in February to raise money for Refugee Support Devon. I have been inspired to support refugees after reading a book with my mum called 'The Boy at the Back of the Class' by Onjali Q Rauf. It's a great book about a boy who has lost his family and sister. I now know a lot more about the difficult times refugees have been through and the beauty of friendship. Please sponsor me to swim like a fish and hit my challenge target of 5 kilometres in February!

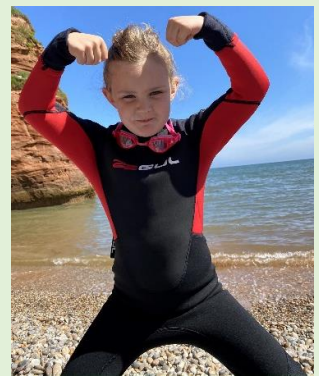
But who is Betsy and why did she choose RSD? We thought we ought to find out...

Tell us a little about yourself:

My name is Betsy Salt and I go to St Peter's school in Lymestone. Art and Performing Arts are my favourite subjects. In my spare time I have so many passions but at home I am always doing art or crafting. I also go horse riding and swimming regularly and I love singing and drama too.

When did you read the book, 'the Boy at the Back of the Class'?

I am still reading the book and I am on the last chapter at the moment. I read it with my mum at bedtimes. I love this time as we get lots of time to chat about things. It is about a boy who joins a new school, he is different but a group of children want to be his friends and find out his story and



Betsy starts her challenge

how he ran away from war but has lost his family and sister. They desperately want to help him find his parents and hatch a great plan. I won't say anything else as you should read it!

Lots of people probably will now! How did you feel as you read the book?

It made me feel lots of emotions. I felt sad for Ahmet, the refugee boy who lost his home and family. It made me feel happy that he had such amazing new friends and grateful for my own family and friends.

Why did you choose to do a swimming challenge?

I just love to swim, it makes me feel powerful. I am in a world of my own and makes me feel so happy. I wanted to see how far I could swim in a month and the book inspired me to do something to help.



With 'the Boy at the Back of the Class'

Why did you choose RSD?

We looked up online who our local refugee support charity was and chose a local one rather than a big charity. Small charities do amazing work and need our help. My mum used to work for a small charity so she helped me decide.

Betsy smashed her original target of £100 before February had even started. She has now raised over £800 and is aiming to raise £1,000 by the end of the month. On the morning of 11 February she was interviewed on BBC Radio Devon's breakfast programme, you can hear the interview by visiting <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0bhw91q>, it starts at 1 hour 49 mins and 35 seconds, and lasts about 5 minutes. We think Betsy is absolutely amazing and we want to do as much as we can to help her reach her target so please share this story with your networks.

Above all...THANK YOU BETSY! From everyone at RSD.

Get ready for Refugee Week 2022!

Many RSD newsletter readers will have fond memories of the wonderful event held on the Quay last June as part of Exeter's Refugee Week events. This year Refugee Week will run from 20 to 26 June and the theme will be 'healing'. RSD has formed a Refugee Week committee which is currently in the process of deciding how to mark the occasion. Discussions are at an early stage right now but the

Committee has agreed on three priorities, as follows:

- (1) Community welcome - doing something that refugees can enjoy.
- (2) Involving different groups, and other communities and organisations that work with minorities
- (3) Fundraising for RSD

Committee members will be attending meetings held by Bristol Refugee Festival and online Refugee Week conference sessions, and will report back on any ideas/inspiration or possibility for partnership. You will be hearing a lot more about Refugee Week 2022 in the coming months, so please watch this space!



RSD's 2021 Refugee Week event at Exeter Quay included actors dressed as Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in 16th Century France

And finally...

RSD supporter Richard Toye contacted us recently to tell us that he will be running the Zurich Marathon in April, in memory of his father, and he will be raising donations for RSD in the process. On his JustGiving page Richard says, "I will be running the Zurich Marathon in memory of my father, John Toye (1942-2021). Refugee Support Devon is a cause that would have been close to his heart, as it combines the local and the international." We'll be telling you more about Richard and his marathon attempt very soon. In the meantime, if you're intending to do something like Richard - or Betsy - and you will be collecting sponsorship - then please think about nominating RSD as your chosen charity. Let us know what you will be doing and we can help promote your challenge in our newsletter and via social media. Even if you aren't contemplating anything quite as energetic you can still help RSD to continue providing its services to our vulnerable clients. **Donations via bank transfer** can be made through our bank account, Refugee Support (Devon) Ltd., Cooperative Bank account number 65849280, sort code 08 92 99. If you would like to make a regular donation ask us about our **400 appeal**, which aims to get 400 people to sign up to a monthly £10 direct debit. **To donate through PayPal or by using a debit or credit card**, search for Refugee Support Devon via



The 400 appeal

the PayPal Giving Fund or visit our website, <https://refugeesupportdevon.org.uk> and click on the 'donate now' tab. Lastly: please consider **leaving a legacy to RSD in your will**. For advice speak to a solicitor or a will-writer. You will need the following: Refugee Support Devon, Exeter Community Centre, 17 St Davids Hill, Exeter EX4 3RG, registered charity no.1143884. If you need more information about supporting RSD, call 01392 682185 or e-mail info@refugeesupportdevon.org.uk . And remember:

- £10 - pays for a vital medical prescription for those who are destitute
- £20 - provides mobile phone credit, enabling vital communication with solicitors and family
- £50 - purchases a bus ticket to attend an immigration hearing or legal appointment
- £100 - helps to equip someone's first home with essentials after long periods of destitution or insecure accommodation. It can also pay for a team of volunteers to be trained to help respond to queries from asylum seekers and refugees
- £500 - funds a staff member for a week to coordinate volunteers and respond to queries from the most vulnerable

Thank you!