

REFUGEE SUPPORT DEVON

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2021



RSD at Exeter Quay...will YOU be there?

On 26 June RSD will be hosting an outdoor Refugee Week event at Exeter's historic Quay which will be among the most ambitious projects the organisation has ever attempted. Jeremy Toye, RSD volunteer and member of the event organising committee, explains: "The theme for this year's Refugee Week is 'We Cannot Walk Alone' and we want to celebrate our region's centuries-old tradition of offering sanctuary to people at risk from across the world.

"We want to pay tribute to the bravery and strength which every refugee shows in escaping horrors in their homeland to reach a place of refuge and safety in Devon," Jeremy says. "We also want to celebrate how each wave of newcomers has added to the rich cultural mix which we all now enjoy in our city, towns and villages."

Nationally, Refugee Week this year is from 14 to 20 June but this event is planned for 26 June because the government's last Covid restrictions will end - hopefully - on 21 June. The day-long series of events will feature poignant re-enactments of refugee arrivals on the Exe River, including the Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in 17th century France, children sent to Devon to escape the bombing of London in World War Two and escaping Nazi Germany, and the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and Africa in the present day.



Exeter's historic Quay - the venue for RSD's event

On dry land an exhibition by the United Nations

refugee agency UNHCR, housed in a genuine tent used in refugee camps across the world, will show how one family from Syria received the generous support of a whole community in Ottery St Mary. Refugee Support Devon and its local partners will show how modern arrivals are offered a wide range of support, from the big issues of housing and schools to the day-to-day complexities of banking and bus passes. The Transit Shed on the Quayside's north shore will house a photo exhibition and a wide range of music and food. A panel of invited speakers, including members of the diverse communities who have made their homes in the area, will also share their experiences, and offer a flavour of the contribution they have brought to the life of their local surroundings.

Everything on offer, from 11am to 6pm, is accessible to all and will be free but RSD will happily accept any donations, which will help to support the event. As Jeremy says: "Whether you want to Float a Boat for forty pounds, Tune up the Tunesmiths for a tenner, Fly a Flag for a fiver or Cook up a Cookie for a couple of quid, all donations, large or small, will be very welcome." Please visit RSD's website (refugeesupportdevon.org.uk) and click on the 'donate now' button in the top right-hand corner, or make a cash donation on the day.

Please come along if you can, we hope to see you there!

RSD allotment makeover

RSD's community allotment is a quiet, peaceful space where clients can enjoy 'gardening therapy' whilst growing their own produce in the St Thomas area of Exeter. Any surplus produce is donated to the drop-in, for use by other clients and those in particular need and the allotment is looked after year round by RSD's team of volunteers. On 27 May a collaboration project was organised by allotment volunteer Mark Breeze, who contacted Wood for Good Exeter and Co-CreatE to ask if they could deliver a workshop on site in the allotment to assist with building some new raised beds and a composter.

Wood For Good are a not-for-profit organisation who 'do anything with wood or concrete'! They run courses in anything from basic DIY skills to upcycling furniture, all with the aim of promoting wellbeing and social engagement. Tony from Wood For Good said, "We had a perfect day for woodworking and managed to achieve all we set out to do with some help from the St Thomas Residents Park Group and the RSD volunteers, along with the fabulous skills of Ahmed, who was



Preparing the ground and removing the rubbish



Constructing the composter

brilliant at everything we were doing, and Mahmoud, who used to be a carpenter back home. Language was a big barrier but thankfully modern technology and speaking translation apps helped achieve communication."

Wood For Good are keen to assist with skills development and engagement in community garden projects. "Building little libraries, community noticeboards, places of nature to build bird and



Mahmoud shows off his carpentry skills

bug houses...the list is almost endless!" Tony says. "We will be expanding our activities in the future to include fabric workshops, leather work, cooking and any creative ideas will be considered."

We would like to thank Tony and John, and everyone who volunteered their time to make this project such a success. To find Wood For Good search Facebook ([woodforgoodexeter](#)) and search Instagram for Co-CreatE ([Co-createxeter](#)).



Team photo at the end of a good day's work!

Getting to know RSD's trustees - Ben Hudson

In our last newsletter we interviewed Bob Mycock, one of RSD's longest-serving trustees. In this issue Dr Ben Hudson (pictured below), one of the most recent additions to RSD's Board, has agreed to come under the spotlight...

Ben's Background

I am an academic lawyer at the University of Exeter. My PhD was on internal displacement and my current research has a particular focus on forced migration and the concept of migrant vulnerability as utilised by the European Court of Human Rights.

How did you first get involved with refugees and asylum seekers?

My first degree was in architecture but it provided limited career opportunities for me at the time, so I did a Master's degree in



international development. It included a module on human rights and I soon realised how much refugees and asylum seekers need the support of the international community. I lobbied the University of Bristol to create scholarships enabling refugees and asylum seekers to access higher education. That was successful and the scheme has now been rolled out to several other universities. I was always interested in the South Caucasus region - Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan - and after I finished my Master's the opportunity came up to work for a year in Georgia with an NGO on two UN-related projects on internal displacement. I was the only native English speaker there, even among the UN team, so I spent a lot of time writing reports and attending UN meetings. But I also got to drive out to villages in western Georgia, meeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and getting a flavour for what IDP life is really like.

What specific challenges do internally displaced persons - as opposed to refugees and asylum seekers - face?

In theory many of the challenges faced by refugees do not affect IDPs, they are still in their home country and they can rely on state support. In practice they often feel that the people they fear most are the ones with the most control over them. Many feel trapped within their own country and so they move around, never feeling secure about registering with the local authorities, and disenfranchised from the state. So they never settle, their children don't go to school, that sort of thing. They also tend to be the poorest people with no means to travel internationally to escape their situation.

Refugees benefit from international refugee conventions but there are no conventions covering IDPs. Guidelines exist but not all countries implement them. It's often hard to tell if they do or not and some countries deny having any IDPs at all.

Initially Georgia didn't take much responsibility for IDPs but that changed, I believe largely because Georgia wanted to join the EU. They therefore had to provide support for IDPs - accommodation etc. - and they have benefitted from EU funding in doing so.

How did you first get involved with RSD?

RSD was mentioned as a potential partner organisation when I was lobbying the University of Bristol to create scholarships for refugees and asylum seekers. Soon after I started work at the University of Exeter, Elena Isayev stepped down from the RSD Board. We had worked together on the Exeter scholarship and she thought I would be a good replacement for her so she put me in touch with Jenny Longford. I was elected to the Board about a year ago.

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What are your initial thoughts about RSD?

The University has had to adapt to online teaching this year - with a larger-than-expected number of students - so much of my time has been taken up with working through all that and as a result I haven't had as much opportunity to get involved with RSD as I would have liked. However I have been very impressed with the resilience the organisation has shown - doing as much as it possibly can to continue providing support for its clients during these very difficult times - and also for its forward-looking attitude, exemplified by Neli and her volunteers pursuing accreditation to provide Level 2 immigration advice. I knew how important RSD was to the local refugee community but before I moved down here I wasn't aware of how little other local support exists. There was actually more support available in Georgia - refugees and IDPs could simply walk into local UN or EU agency offices to ask for help.

How do you view your role on the Board?

I am still getting to grips with how the Board runs but I have volunteered to conduct a governance review when circumstances allow. In the future I would like to think more creatively about links between RSD and the University of Exeter and also Exeter College, and how they support refugees and asylum seekers through education.

And what are your future plans?

I have bought a house in Exeter and am committed to staying in this area. I will continue working at the University and would like to get more involved with Exeter as a place, for example with local events like Refugee Week that make a real impact, and perhaps even helping to create new events specific to Exeter and its people. I now sit on the national steering group for Universities of Sanctuary, and I will continue my research on 'migrant vulnerability in law' - in this respect, I am applying for funding to visit the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. I am a Director of the Lincolnshire Refugee Doctor Project. They recently published their first three-year review (<http://www.lincsrefugeedoctors.co.uk/Files/LRDP-Report-Finalised.pdf>) and it would be great to get something like this up and running in the south-west. In the longer term I would like to return to Georgia, to explore internal displacement as a result of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Our thanks to Ben: we wish him every success with his future plans. Interviews with other RSD trustees, staff members and volunteers will follow in future newsletters.

Exeter Community Centre update

Whilst much of RSD's work is still being done via the telephone or online as staff work from home, there are some things which can only be done in person, such as helping clients complete forms (especially those that then need to be signed); providing financial support to those who are destitute and do not have bank accounts; and performing initial consultations with new clients. We are delighted to say that, as lockdown restrictions ease and things start to open up again, we have resumed face-to-face contact with clients in our Exeter Community Centre offices on three days per week. Neli and her team of volunteers continue to meet clients by appointment on Tuesdays as well as Thursdays; and Tameem has started seeing VPR clients on Wednesdays. We will be keeping a close eye on the government's plans for full reopening, scheduled for 21 June, but in the meantime entry to the Community Centre remains restricted to pre-arranged appointments only. Any clients wishing to see Neli or one of her team should call 01392 682185 to book an appointment.

More Refugee Week news - get running (or walking) for RSD!



We are very grateful to our friends at Exeter City of Sanctuary, who have sponsored an event in collaboration with Heavitree and Wonford Running Group (HWRG) during Refugee Week. 'We Cannot Walk Alone' is a 30 mile virtual relay event, running or walking, happening during the week 20th-26th June. ExCoS will be paying for all the medals, prizes and other costs and all funds raised will go to RSD. RSD trustee Liz Oxburgh comments: "Exeter City of Sanctuary is a terrific local champion of refugees and asylum-seekers in Exeter. They are great supporters of RSD and we very much appreciate their continued moral and financial help."

Heavitree and Wonford Running group are a fantastic organisation, regularly raising money for local charities. They have a large running network

community and lots of people and teams have already signed up for 'We Cannot Walk Alone' The entry fee is £5 per person and information about how to join the event or sponsor the runners is available from their Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HeavitreeAndWonfordRG>)

Please support this event if you can - the runners and walkers are supporting us!

RSD's response to the Home Office's new immigration plan

There has been a great deal in the press recently about the new plan for immigration proposed by Home Secretary Priti Patel. The plan was the subject of a public consultation which ended earlier this month (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>) and RSD was one of many organisations which responded to the proposals.

Responses had to be made via the Home Office's form, which comprised a series of questions, some of which offered 'multiple choice' answers ('strongly agree/agree/disagree/strongly disagree' etc.). A number of responding organisations, including RSD, chose to ignore most of these questions, arguing that it was not possible to make clear the nuance of the issues in the responses available and making the point that the wording of these questions sometimes made any response imply agreement with or acceptance of the proposals being made.

The length and format of the form does not allow us to publish RSD's answers in detail here, however trustee David Mezzetti commented as follows:

"RSD responded to the 'consultation' on Priti Patel's New Plan for Immigration. Along with pretty well every organisation set up to advise, protect and support vulnerable migrants we registered our strong opposition to the premise and stated objectives of the plan. Our view is that attempts to grant 'leave to remain' only to those who arrive in the UK by 'legal' channels and via pre-arranged applications (such as those from Hong Kong) would worsen the safety, health, well-being and future prospects of people seeking protection in the UK - both those here and those yet to come. We recognise that those who have made perilous journeys to get to Europe and the UK are fundamentally asylum seekers and need to be listened to and offered protection and the right to family re-union where applicable. Many lives have been disastrously impacted by decades of hostile immigration legislation. This New Plan is seriously flawed, will not work and if it survives, will add to the view that Britain can no longer feel proud of its history of protecting the vulnerable."



Refugee Support Devon
proudly presents



Destination - Devon!

Join us to celebrate Devon's centuries-long tradition
of welcoming people fleeing danger

The Transit Shed, Exeter Quay

Saturday, 26th June 2021, 11:00 - 17:00

Dramatic re-enactments

UNHCR Exhibition

Music

Talks and discussions

Food



11:00 Huguenots flee across the channel and are welcomed onto the Quay

14:00 Children escaping from warfare and danger find homes in Devon

16:00 *Inclusive Exeter* presents dance and music

Food available at lunchtime



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency
United Kingdom for UNHCR



RSD is celebrating its 20th year of supporting vulnerable
people from all around the world to resettle in Devon.

refugeesupportdevon.org.uk

RSD needs YOU!

RSD has been helping refugees and asylum seekers rebuild their lives in Devon for 20 years, but we can only continue to do it with your support. Treasurer Chris Hill comments:

The financial accounts have now been finalised for the year to 31st March, 2021 and will soon be forwarded to our external auditors for verification. We were fortunate that the level of income for the year 2020/21 of £217k was very similar to the previous year, which is a great tribute to the hard work of the fundraising team, working under difficult conditions. As a result no services had to be cut or curtailed. Subject to audit, we anticipate holding reserves of £169k at the year end. The current level of overheads, including salaries, totals £190k. We already have income of about £120k confirmed for 2021/22, but, as it is prudent for us to have adequate reserve levels to cover future activities, there is a challenging year ahead for the fundraising team.

Much of RSD's work is entirely reliant on private grants and donations and, regular or one-off, large or small, we are very grateful for them all

- £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

So if you're intending to do something like a triathlon or a marathon - 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 help. **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



The 400 appeal

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 PayPal Giving Fund or visit www.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 . Thank you!