

Slough Refugee Support

*Annual Review
2020-2021*

SRS through the pandemic





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REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATION DETAILS

Charity Name Slough Refugee Support

Charity Registration Number 1079776

Principal Office 28 Bath Road, Slough, SL1 3SR

Bankers

Unity Trust Bank plc

Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HB

CAF Bank Ltd

25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill,
West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ

The 2020-21 Accounts feature in
The Trustees' Annual Report at
www.sloughrefugeesupport.org.uk



CHAIR'S REPORT 2021-2021



In spite of the very many challenges presented by the pandemic and the lockdowns, I am proud to be able to say that Slough Refugee Support continued to work hard to meet the varied needs of our asylum seeking and refugee clients. Our Drop In which provides advice for clients without an appointment, our creche and classes were unable to run as usual in our offices, but this did not stop us finding other ways of reaching out to our clients.

A telephone helpline was set up and, when restrictions allowed, appointments were made for urgent cases to meet with a caseworker in a Covid-secure manner. This gave us the opportunity to disseminate vital information to our clients regarding the pandemic and the availability of the vaccine as Slough continued to have a high rate of Covid infections.

SRS recently underwent a remote audit conducted by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner and I am pleased to report that we were able to satisfy the OISC on all the criteria they assessed us on. Our thanks to Rose, Mahmuna and the adviser team for all their hard work which helped to achieve this. During the year, our advisers and caseworkers supported 164 clients, including their family members, who came from 32 countries, and between them spoke a total of 24 languages. SRS had to deal with the challenges of limited Home Office provision during the pandemic, plus helping a number of families newly relocated into Slough – many of whom faced destitution and extreme isolation. In addition, as well as supporting the families on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme, we ran clinics for asylum seekers, temporarily housed at the Holiday Inn in Slough.

We put out an urgent call for laptops and tablets to be delivered to families to ensure the children

could engage in home schooling, and ran English for Speakers of Other Language and Information Technology classes via Zoom. We are looking forward to reopening the offices so that face-to-face classes can resume as we realise the importance of the social as well as the educational aspects of these classes.

The loneliness and isolation of our clients reinforced by the lockdown reminds us how important it is for us to provide social events and activities and we really hope we will be able to restart these during the summer. SRS acts as an extended family to our clients and we know they are missing the opportunities to meet up with us and their peers. Many of our children have no safe outdoor space, so the few play dates we have been able to run were a welcome healthy change for the families.

We have been successful in securing specific, often booster, funding to help us overcome the challenges of the pandemic. We are very grateful to the funders who have supplied this assistance and this has made us realise that they, like us, understand the vital service we supply. This has ensured that Taz Mohammed, our Chief Executive, could lead our hard working team of staff and volunteers to provide creative, flexible and caring provision for our clients – a provision which has been essential to help them settle with dignity in their new community.

Everyone at SRS is hoping that normal service can resume as soon as possible so that we can once again be the open, welcoming place we have always been. We miss our clients and our clients miss us.



OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES



MISSION STATEMENT

Slough Refugee Support is a friendly organisation committed to impartially helping all asylum seekers and refugees in Slough and surrounding areas to achieve their rights and settle with dignity in a new community.

CHARITABLE OBJECTS

The charity was established to provide for the relief of poverty, the preservation and protection of physical and mental health, and the advancement of education of asylum seekers and refugees in Slough and neighbouring Local Authority areas, at the discretion of the Trustees.

KEY OBJECTIVES AND MAIN ACTIVITIES

SRS has identified five key objectives and operates programmes designed to deliver outcomes against each objective, as follows.

1. To welcome asylum seekers and refugees in Slough and surrounding areas, and to help them to become integrated into the local community and life in the UK.

- Drop-in initial advice sessions on immigration and asylum claims, appeals, etc, and follow-up casework.
- Referring clients as appropriate to our partner organisation K&B Solicitors for more in-depth advice on immigration and asylum matters.
- Signposting relevant external services and agencies as appropriate to clients' individual needs.

2. To assist our clients to stay safe, avoid destitution and to maintain their physical and mental health.

- For refugees and asylum seekers identified at high risk of destitution, we provide basic assistance as necessary, including arranging foodstuff donations from local businesses.
- Outreach casework with refugee families in the Slough area.
- Providing highly personalised advice and day to day support for our most vulnerable clients, including those with complex health problems: e.g. assisting with booking and attending hospital appointments.
- Raising awareness of female genital mutilation (FGM).
- Sewing classes and other group activities that reduce risks of social isolation and build confidence.

3. To support our clients to achieve their rights and entitlements and to access life sustaining services provided by government and other authorities and agencies.

- Tailored advice and casework on accessing basic services such as housing, benefits, healthcare, and school places.
- Awareness raising of partner agencies' staff and volunteers about issues that particularly affect asylum seekers and refugees.

4. To support our clients' own desires to be independent and self-reliant, including where appropriate to pursue opportunities for employment.

- English language and I.T. classes.
- Building Better Opportunities' programme: support for all stages of preparing for and seeking employment.
- For those not yet ready for paid employment: help with obtaining volunteering placements.

5. To celebrate and enhance the cultural richness and diversity that refugees contribute to British society, locally and nationally.

- Organising activities and events that bring refugees together and also into contact with the settled community in Slough.
- Whenever possible, giving talks to local groups that raise awareness of the contribution of refugees to local life.

PUBLIC BENEFIT

In setting our aims and objectives and planning our activities, the Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

SRS is registered with the Office of Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to deliver immigration advice up to Level 3.

Thanks to our Funders and Supporters

GRANTS

AB Charitable Trust
BBC Children in Need
Berkshire Community Foundation
Big Lottery Community Fund
Building Better Opportunities
Clothworkers Foundation
Garfield Weston Foundation
Hilden Charitable Fund
NHS Slough
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (Syrian Resettlement Programme)
Slough Borough Council (Syrian Resettlement Programme)
Tesco Bags of Help
Thomas Wall Trust
Trusthouse Charitable Foundation

DONATIONS

We are very grateful for all the kind donations we have received this year. As well as money donations, we have received include clothing, baby goods and regular supplies of food. Funds were raised through social media activities. Thank you to all our kind supporters.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Jean Kelly (Chair)
Nigel Woof (Secretary)
Denise Snowden (Treasurer)
Eman Malash
Igbal Abdeali
John Kennedy
Mohamed Al-Mansouri
Ray Barkley
Rupert Young
Zakarya Saeed

SRS STAFF

Taz Mohammed – Chief Executive Officer
Abobaker Mohamed – Finance Officer
Anissa Benaziza – Assistant Family Support Worker
Anita Soni – IT Tutor
Diane Khechab – Building Better Opportunities (BBO)
Keriann Belcher – Family Support Worker
Mahmuna Hasnath – Solicitor
Mel Hodge – BBO
Rebecca Quin – Housekeeper
Rose Njoroge – Senior Case Worker
Zabihullah Liwal-Saam DBS Officer/General Assistant

VOLUNTEER ADVISERS

Helen Niven
Jenny Griffin
John Kennedy
Kate Pattinson
Luciane Delaney

GENERAL VOLUNTEERS

Ali Maye
Bakr Ahmad
Diane Lewis
Dorina Doda
Fahima Amin
Georgina Heritage
Kamila Imtiyas
Sadouf Mohammed
Sandrina Dulapandan
Stephen Taylor
Tom Kelly
Yassin Abdallah
Zakarya Saeed

INTERPRETERS

Abubaker Ahmad (Baqr)
Anissa Benaziza
Mohamed Al-Mansouri
Fahima Amin

Rhoda Strachan

We are very sad to report that on 25th January, 2021 we lost Rhoda, a dedicated volunteer of more than 17 years, to Covid-19 and other health complications. Rhoda had a great passion for helping vulnerable asylum



seekers and refugees and, despite her visual impairment, she provided advice and support to our clients. She was a great advocate for them and was always determined to go the extra mile to achieve the best outcomes for clients. She was very knowledgeable on matters relating to welfare benefits and she was never fobbed off by government officials, particularly benefit agencies. Over the years, she helped to improve the quality of life of many clients, whilst encouraging them to become independent and active participants in the Slough community. She served as a trustee for SRS in 2008/9. Rhoda was warm, professional, reliable, generous and very friendly. She will be missed dearly by all at SRS. May her soul rest in eternal peace.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT



Slough Refugee Support, like other charities, faced unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic during 2020/21. As a front-line organisation, we remained open throughout the year, with our Hotline team working in the office under secure conditions, whilst all other staff worked from home. Thanks to the resilience of our staff and volunteer advisers, we adapted quickly to the changing environment and provided a telephone helpline for our clients and a limited number of face-to-face appointments for complex cases.

Knowing our services would be in demand during lockdown, we worked hard to successfully secure funding from Berkshire Community Foundation, the Big Lottery, Garfield Weston, Children in Need, Hilden Charitable Fund and AB Charitable Trust. We are very grateful to these funders as

they helped us deliver vital services to our clients, even though we were unable to run our usual full provision.

Keeping clients, volunteers and staff safe was our key priority, so, from March 2020, we closed our drop-in activities, appointments and in-house classes. We kept the office open on Mondays and Wednesdays, when restrictions allowed, and a skeleton staff, adhering to government guidelines, carried out administrative and urgent tasks. Two members of staff were put on furlough, whilst the rest were able to work from home.

Rose and Mahmuna managed the casework, with senior volunteer advisers working from home on a rota. Advice and information were given on the

phone to clients by calls and text messages, with follow up emails when necessary. At the same time, we made regular calls to clients to make sure that they were safe and advised them to follow the guidelines from the local authority. Coronavirus continued to have a major impact on our events, meaning that summer and Christmas parties were cancelled. Keriann and Jean conducted doorstep visits to the families, taking toys and activities for children during lockdown. Sadly, we had to close our very popular sewing classes, but these will be the top of our priority list to reinstate when restrictions allow.



We supported the local authority's and other organisations' efforts to develop community resilience during the pandemic by attending Slough's One Community Response online

meetings. I am proud of the way SRS responded to the needs of our clients by providing practical advice as well as other activities via the phone and virtual classes via tablets for clients who wanted to carry on with our English and IT classes. The staff team met weekly on Zoom, and trustees' meetings continued in this way.

As the lockdown eases, we are following local guidance on the best way to open our offices, but we realise this will need to be in a limited manner initially to ensure we keep clients, staff and volunteers safe. I would like to thank our funders who have supported us throughout the pandemic.

I would also like to show my appreciation to our volunteer advisers who have worked tirelessly from home providing support to our clients on various issues from immigration to benefits.

The staff have been flexible and professional, benefiting from the support given by our trustees and, in particular, our chair.



What about the future?

We hear all the time from our refugees and people seeking asylum that they desperately want to build relationships, find employment and so integrate successfully in their new communities. This is in all our interests. But incredibly the current system places many barriers in their way.

Two key obstacles are the shortage of English language classes including the fact that people seeking asylum are not permitted to access these, and the many challenges refugees face in finding employment.

SRS's contribution to enabling refugees to integrate successfully will focus on these two areas, in addition to our front-line services, such as our core immigration and family support work.

We will use the experience and concerns of our clients to inform our campaigns and advocacy and connect with other organisations working in these fields to identify the particular contribution we can make at SRS to strengthen our overall impact.

Thank you to all once again.

Taz Mohammed

CEO



This year, SRS has reaped the benefit of working in partnership with a range of organisations



One Slough Community Response

Throughout the pandemic, a diverse range of individual volunteers, community groups and charities have worked together with the One Slough Community Response team to serve those in need. Taz, our Chief Executive, has attended weekly zoom meetings and SRS's primary role has been to take government and local advice back into the community and feedback community issues to the Response team. Our advisers ran a telephone helpline and some individual appointments were arranged when restrictions allowed, so they were able to disseminate up-to-date Covid information to our clients. As SRS is a front-line service, Slough CVS has facilitated our staff and volunteers to receive the Covid vaccinations. Anissa has translated information into Arabic so that we could distribute Covid public health advice to our client group, as a way of educating the refugee community about the availability of the vaccine and dispelling myths about the pandemic.



South East Partnership for Migration

Keriann and Rose attended regular zoom meetings with a multidisciplinary team, comprising of NHS health visitors, Thames Valley Police, the Holiday Inn staff, the Home Office, the Red Cross, and

Slough Borough Council staff to arrange the welfare of a group of asylum seekers and refugees who were based in the Holiday Inn, Slough, throughout the pandemic. It soon became clear to the team that SRS's general knowledge and experience of dealing with refugees was important in developing essential support for the asylum seekers.

Keriann initially held a weekly 'clinic', assisted by a translator, in the hotel to focus on the needs of families based there. She helped ensure families were registered with dentists and doctors and that they had appropriate clothing and baby equipment. She liaised with the Baby Bank, Cow Shed (a crisis charity) and other community providers to ensure the needs of the families were met. Keriann facilitated discussions regarding meals for the residents and encouraged the development of a child friendly menu.

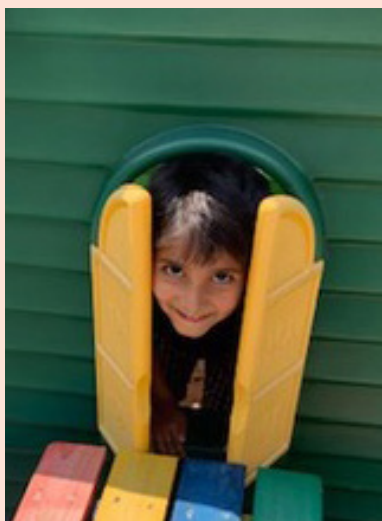
A welcome outcome has been that Keriann has developed an even stronger relationship with community health care professionals, who have asked for SRS's help when dealing with refugee families. This has opened up further opportunities to work closely with these professionals once lockdown is eased.

Working with the families during the lockdown

SRS has supported children's home schooling, providing laptops and IT support when necessary. In addition, SRS has negotiated with four schools to ensure nine vulnerable children were able to attend school during the lockdown. Eden School, who were particularly supportive by providing a family with weekly food donations and supplying school uniforms, said, "It's always such a pleasure to work alongside SRS". Other schools have welcomed working in partnership

with SRS, especially as older children start secondary schools and our network of schools widens.

During the summer, we ran a series of Play Dates and invited families who had no outside space for their children to play in. The children loved playing in our safe garden and mixing with the friends they had not been able to see during lock down. Mums, too, benefitted from the Play Dates, saying that siblings played well together when in our garden whereas they had been squabbling when confined to their flats.



When restrictions allowed, SRS conducted doorstep visits to the families and took educational toys and books for the children. Funding from Tesco Bags of Help ensure that we could buy early



toys for the children and one family was delighted when we provided them with funds to buy a Christmas tree.



learning play packs of educational toys for pre-school children unable to attend nursery.

Sadly, we could not organise our usual Christmas party in 2020, but we visited the families to give them



Online IT Learning

"As the pandemic took hold," says Anita Soni, our IT tutor, "I was asked to run some IT classes online – something I hadn't done before. The response of learners to attend Zoom classes was



Anita Soni

great as so many felt lockdown gave them the time to learn some new skills and to become more confident with IT. Once accounts were set up and the learners became familiar with using Zoom, the classes began. SRS provided them with new tablets and courses have been running online for the academic year. The keen learners have been a pleasure to teach and have come on in leaps and bounds. All learners were complete novices to start with, but now they can use IT with so much self-confidence. As well as adjusting personal settings, emailing with attachments, using the internet and keeping safe online, they can create professional looking documents in Word and generally have a very good understanding of IT."

(These classes were funded by The Thomas Wall Trust.)

STATISTICAL DATA FOR APRIL 2020– MARCH 2021

Introduction

This report gives a picture of the work of SRS during the year APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021

The terms below are used as follows:

“Users”: This indicates the number of people using the services at least once. These numbers do not include return visits.

“Beneficiaries”: this counts every member of a household.

“User Household”: This indicates the number of family units – both single people and families

“Visits”: This indicates the number of visits or consultations – i.e. the volume of our work.

These numbers include return visits.



USERS (DROP-IN AND CASEWORK SERVICES) TOTAL

New User Households	55
Total, inc. family members	79
Drop-in Total User Households	125
Total, inc. family members	247
Casework Total User Households	70
Total, inc. family members	164

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

USER HOUSEHOLDS	DROP IN	CASEWORK
AFGHANISTAN	10	8
ALBANIA	2	3
ALGERIA	4	2
BANGLADESH	3	1
BHUTAN	0	1
BURUNDI	1	0
CAMEROON	1	0
CHINA	2	0
EGYPT	2	0
ERITREA	2	0
GAMBIA	0	1
GUINEA	2	0
INDIA	1	0
IRAN	9	4
IRAQ	5	1
IVORY COAST	1	0
KENYA	1	2
KOSOVO	1	0
KUWAIT	4	4
LIBERIA	0	1
LIBYA	2	1
MOROCCO	1	0
NIGERIA	2	0
OTHER (POSSIBLY STATELESS)	5	0
PAKISTAN	7	6
PALESTINE	1	0
SAUDI ARABIA	2	1
SOMALIA	12	8
SRI LANKA	12	11
SUDAN	5	2
SYRIA	12	8
TANZANIA	2	1
UGANDA	1	1
UNKNOWN	1	1
YEMEN	3	0
ZIMBABWE	5	2
TOTAL 32 COUNTRIES	124	70

GENDER	DROP IN	CASEWORK
Female	76	46
Male	98	62
Unspecified	1	0
Total	175*	108*

*This figure includes beneficiaries who are 17 years old and over.

LANGUAGES

USER HOUSEHOLDS	TOTALS
ALBANIAN	2
ARABIC	30
BENGALI	1
DARI	1
ENGLISH	3
FARSI	7
FRENCH	4
HINDI	1
KOSOVAN	1
KURDISH	6
LUGANDA	1
MALAY	1
MANDARIN	1
OTHER	7
PUNJABI	5
PUSHTO	2
SHONA	3
SOMALI	8
SORANI	1
SWAHILI	4
TAMIL	11
TIBETAN	1
TIGRINA	1
URDU	3
TOTAL	105

Clients speak 24 different first languages.

STATUS USER VISITS	DROP IN	CASEWORK	RECORDED OUTCOMES	DI - Drop In CW - Casework	DI	CW
AS - ASYLUM SEEKER	15	7	AA QUERY OUTSTANDING - Unresolved Query		245	169
BC - BRITISH CITIZEN	8	6	ASY SUP a) S95 - Section 95 secured		0	1
DL - DISCRETIONARY LEAVE TO REMAIN	1	0	ASY SUP b) S4 - Section 4 secured		1	0
HP (5YRS) - HUMANITARIAN PROTECTION (5YRS)	1	2	ASY SUP c) reinstated - Benefits re-instated		0	0
ILR - INDEFINITE LEAVE TO REMAIN	16	8	ASY SUP d) Other - Other		0	0
LLR - LIMITED LEAVE TO REMAIN	5	6	BANK - Opened Account		2	0
NO STATUS	37	17	BANK - Other		0	0
R - REFUSED	4	1	BENEFITS - Obtained benefit		3	1
RA - REFUSED APPEALING	5	6	BENEFITS - Other		7	9
REF (5YRS) - REFUGEE (5 YEARS)	27	15	BENEFITS - Re-instated		1	1
REF (ILR) - REFUGEE (ILR)	8	3	DRIVING - Licence obtained		0	0
TOTAL	127	71	DRIVING - Other		0	0
			EDUCATION - College enrolment		0	0
			EDUCATION- Free meals secured		0	0
			EDUCATION - Other		1	0
			EDUCATION- School place secured		0	0
			EDUCATION - Training course place		0	0
			EMPLOYMENT - Job secured		0	0
			EMPLOYMENT - Other		0	0
			HEALTH - Counselling		0	0
			HEALTH - Other		9	4
			HEALTH - Referred to specialist		0	0
			HEALTH - Found GP		1	0
			HEALTH - Obtained HC1		1	0
			HOUSING - Benefit secured		0	0
			HOUSING - Found accommodation		2	2
			HOUSING - Other		4	2
			HOUSING - Registered with SBC		0	0
			HOUSING - Rent deposit secured		0	0
			IMMIGRATION - Gained BRP Card		0	2
			IMMIGRATION - Gained Citizenship		2	2
			IMMIGRATION - Gained ELR/DL		1	0
			IMMIGRATION - Gained HP		0	1
			IMMIGRATION - Gained ILR		0	0
			IMMIGRATION - Gained Passport		1	0
			IMMIGRATION - Gained Settlement Protection		1	1
			IMMIGRATION - Gained TD		12	1
			IMMIGRATION - Other		5	5
			IMMIGRATION - Passed UK test		0	0
			LEGAL - Other		2	1
			LEGAL - Solicitor referral		0	0
			LEGAL - Solicitor takes case		0	0
			QUERY CLOSED - No outcome		3	5
			REFER TO SPACE - Refer to SPACE		0	1
			UTILITIES - Bill problem resolved		0	0
			UTILITIES - Other		0	0
			UTILITIES - Service arranged		0	0
			WELFARE - Family Support given		2	0
			WELFARE - Money /Clothes given		1	1
			WELFARE - Other		10	3
			WELFARE - Social Serv take responsibility		1	0
TOTAL	125	71	TOTAL		317	212

The largest proportion of Drop-in work is as follows: Immigration 37.85%, Welfare benefits 15.14%, Housing 9.14%, Health 10.72%, Asylum support 12.93%, Welfare 6.62% and legal matters 2.52%

The largest proportion of Casework is as follows: Immigration 34.43%, Welfare benefits 25%, Housing 15.09%, Asylum support 3%, Legal matters 10.37%, Welfare 7.07% and Health 2.83%

CHALLENGES: The pandemic and national lockdowns restrictions in 2020/2021

The Lockdown restrictions and government guidelines required people to social distance, stay at home and work from home. These requirements made our Advice and support services very difficult especially when dealing with clients who have limited English Language and IT skills. The situation was compounded by many of our volunteers being unavailable because they were looking after their children and home schooling, and some were caring for their elderly and/or vulnerable parents and relatives.

SRS resorted mainly to remote telephone advice to ensure we continued supporting our clients in whatever way we could whilst preventing the spread of Covid 19 virus. We however offered limited face to face services when delivering food parcels and clothes to the most vulnerable clients, and supporting those who could not be helped over the phone.



**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

The Hilden Charitable Fund



BBC

**Children
in Need**

TESCO

Bags of Help



**BERKSHIRE
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION**



**BUILDING BETTER
OPPORTUNITIES**

**THE CLOTHWORKERS'
FOUNDATION**



**ROYAL BOROUGH OF
WINDSOR &
MAIDENHEAD**
[WWW.RBWM.GOV.UK](http://www.rbwm.gov.uk)



**COMMUNITY
FUND**



Garfield Weston
FOUNDATION



**Slough
Refugee
Support**

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The Trustees' Annual Report is available at
www.sloughrefugeesupport.org.uk