TAUNTON WELCOMES REFUGEES

charitable incorporated organisation number 1183921

TAUNTON WELCOMES REFUGEES MISSION STATEMENT

1. Our Mission

Our mission is to support any refugee families or individuals and those seeking asylum, from Syria and from any country where there is violent conflict or life-threatening circumstances.

Taunton Welcomes Refugees (TWR) was set up in response to the crisis in Syria and the introduction of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in 2015, whereby Syrians outside Syria in humanitarian need have been given a special status in the UK for 5 years.

In Somerset, the County Council (SCC) undertook to run this Scheme with funding from the Home Office, according to prescribed procedures. These included access to medical, educational, housing, employment, financial and language resources via a Resettlement Team. In our service agreement with SCC, TWR is responsible for some of the 'integration' component of this agreement that SCC has with the Home Office.

The VPRS for Syria ended in March 2020, by which time TWR had offered a welcome to over 20 families. However, since 2020 other refugee groups have been resettled here, and an increasing number of asylum seekers (from all over the world) have been moved by the Home Office into the County with minimum support.

It is our mission to continue to offer (where we can) welcome and support to any refugee or asylum seeker within our catchment area, in such a way that is proportional to need.

TWR operates alongside, but independent of, members of SC's Resettlement Team and other agencies, whose responsibility is to make sure that statutory provision for refugees and asylum seekers with regards to finance, health, education and housing, etc. are carried out.

TWR's primary role has traditionally been to provide caring support circles of volunteers to help each member of a refugee family or each individual to establish themselves in our culture - a surrogate for the kind of network of family and friends that they would have in their own country - so that the members of that family and individuals can become confident, independent citizens, able to function fully and actively within their community. Over time, however, additional models of working have evolved.

We have always recognised the importance of working in a sensitive and appropriate manner with those we support who have experienced not just one but multiple traumas. In 2023 we formally committed ourselves to trying deliver 'best practice' in terms of trauma awareness and this now constitutes an important part of our preparation courses. (See 4h. Trauma-informed Practice)

2. What we do

The way in which TWR interprets its mission is constantly evolving, due to both changing areas of work, and the varying needs of the individuals we seek to befriend. The direct work of TWR in welcoming and befriending is undertaken through such activities as:

- offering befriending circles of volunteers to families, small groups or one-to-one support of individuals.
- offering other services such as language support, workshops, and signposting to other relevant agencies and organisations
- encouraging mutual support and self-help among those we support, through various social activities, use of social media etc.
- Offering basic training to other agencies in Somerset that are involved in supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

Currently we offer:

- befriending young asylum seekers; Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Minors (UASMs), who have arrived in the Taunton area via the National Transfer Scheme
- befriending adult asylum seekers transferred to the Taunton area on the National Dispersal Scheme
- supporting Afghan families relocated on the emergency Afghan Locally Employed Staff Relocation Scheme (ALESRS)
- befriending Afghan families resettled on the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) and others on the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) which replace the VPRS

- befriending those on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, while in temporary accommodation or other urgent need
- supporting non-dispersed asylum seekers in Home Office provided accommodation
- offering coffee and conversation groups for refugees and asylum seekers to meet each other, and to meet and speak with native English speakers
- Offer some more formal English tuition, including to those on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

In order to achieve these objectives TWR:

- regularly recruits, trains and prepares volunteers for befriending and other roles
- works in collaboration with other statutory and charitable bodies engaged in similar or related areas of work, sharing resources wherever possible
- maintains and encourages a supporters' network via its website, newsletter, seminars, social events and news briefs
- promotes the work of TWR in the wider community
- makes representation to Government, at local and national level, on issues pertinent to its work of befriending and supporting refugees and asylum seekers
- fund raises to enable these activities