

UWRSG Update – March 2022

Hello friends

I began this update just as the invasion of Ukraine took place and then stopped.

As you will see, some of this update may seem a bit out of place given the enormity of what is happening, but the items are still important.

Ukraine

While the UK should welcome Ukrainian refugees (and is, to a very limited extent), the UK is not likely to be the destination for most of those fleeing Ukraine who do not have family ties here. The best way to support people from Ukraine is through organisations working on the ground there (the Red Cross in particular) and organisations working across the border.

Money is the best way to help and transporting clothes or other goods across Europe is not helpful, especially as so much is being provided by people closer to the borders.

I have written to Julian Smith to acknowledge and thank him for his stand (whole hearted support) and you may wish to do likewise.

If anyone is doing any fundraising events or is involved in other ways of helping, please let me know and I will spread the word around the network.

Local update volunteers

The response to seeking volunteers for English conversation with refugees in Nelson has been excellent, so good that some of you may not have yet been paired with someone you can converse with.

Future organisation and wider connections

There has been some recent discussions amongst the various groups that make up the Craven network about how we work together, and separately. It is all good and we are likely to strengthen our collective efforts as a result. There is no need for you to anything.

However, there are also ongoing discussions about whether groups might become City of Sanctuary groups and that does require some thought. In order to aid that thinking there will be a Zoom presentation by City of Sanctuary on 28 April @ 7.30pm. I have attached a briefing note which may also be helpful.

Refugee presentations

We have had a number of Zoom presentations over the winter. The last one was a particularly powerful one from Allies for Justice. For reasons of confidentiality we were not able to Zoom the session but there are some notes attached.

The next presentation (poster attached) will be on 30 March and will be on 'destitution'.

Housekeeping and accountability

Partly as a result of our presentations, we have received a very generous donation to support us in our work. At present I don't have permission to disclose the source. Over the years we have sought funding (or collections of goods) to help support international agencies working with refugees in refugee camps, visits to the dale, organisations in the cities such as BIASAN and to support refugees in Skipton. I propose that this funding continues to be used for those purposes but also to support a refugee who is now living in the dale.

However, while I am very grateful to Skipton Refugee Support Group for accepting the money on our behalf and ensuring probity. I do feel it is of a sufficient amount to require some sort of local consensus and oversight. We have not needed this previously as we have only raised funds for prior identified and very specific needs, while general fundraising has gone into the Skipton 'pot', being 'our' local place where refugees have been welcomed.

I am not proposing we have a committee (although if others feel that is the way forward and would like to organise this, I would be very happy!) but I would find it helpful if a couple of you might be prepared to discuss this with me and form a shared view.

Local volunteer/ support

X, a refugee living in UW, is already well supported in the community but, if there are people in the dale who can offer - work experience, additional language tuition, community involvement - all the things that support integration, please get in touch.

Nationality and Borders bill

The N & B bill is currently in the Lords and will return to the commons later in March. The Lords have had well informed and evidenced debates on the bill. We have signed petitions with other groups and made our voices heard over the months. I did not feel the needed to do more while it was in the Lords and we should reserve our campaigning energy for its return to the commons.

Judging by the recent bills going through the commons, it seems that all Conservative MPs will follow the whip irrespective of the views of civil society and even their MPs. Julian Smith, for example has spoken out

for refugees but has never broken party ranks. Nonetheless we need to keep trying. We need a big surge of letters as the bill comes back to the commons and I will produce something that might be helpful for this.

Please be ready to respond.

I am writing this from a motor home in Spain on a mobile phone and had to give up on the lap top (with a lot of swearing about the technology, phone signals and WiFi.). So I there are hiccougths just let me know (eg I'm not entirely sure the word documents will open correctly!)

Best wishes to all and keep persevering, it has never been more important.

Stella

Attachment 1

Craven Refugee Support Network

report of Zoom session with Allies for Justice



On 13 January the Craven Refugee Support Network hosted a presentation from **Allies for Justice**, a campaigning group working with **Detention Action** to improve and eradicate immigration detention. Given the vulnerability of refugees within the immigration system, we have not been able to record the event and this is a summary.

We heard about people's experience of fleeing persecution and navigating the asylum/immigration system in the UK. We heard powerful testimonies of the difficulties people face and are very grateful to Allies for Justice for raising awareness in this way. We identified a way forward at the end and we will return to this in the future.

Steven spoke about 'fleeing' danger and risk, and the need to just get away. The consequences of that - where to go, where there might be safety, comes over time, especially when moving from one conflict to another to another. The journeys are not straightforward or easy.

Ruudi talked about how the asylum process was designed to 'wear you down', every step being another difficulty, not an answer. He talked about how you have to 'keep going' and how hard it is to find the motivation to do so.

Winnie expanded on that and spoke about having life on hold and living with the constant fear of deportation. She talked about feeling hopeless, not being able to invest in the future with work, study or having a family. She touched on destitution and homelessness as a result of being refused leave to stay and the importance of the courts. She said the Home Office has a culture of disbelief but the courts listen with an open mind and so the appeal process is vital. Winnie received a lot of help and now campaigns for others to 'pay back' for that help.

Mishka spoke about the Nationality and Borders bill and the impact it will have on the future - the two-tier system, the offshoring of asylum claims and criminalisation of asylum seekers. The bill is coming back to the House of Commons shortly, after being discussed in the House of Lords, and the campaigning needs to continue.

Maria talked about what Allies for Justice is doing and how we can connect with them. She mentioned there will be Calls for Action coming out soon so we will look out for those. Their

main email contacts are Steven Shyaka steven@detentionaction.org.uk and Maria Brul maria@detentionaction.org.uk

In her closing remarks Megan (City of Sanctuary) explored four areas for where we could have an impact:

- Campaign against the bill
- Mitigate its impacts and act with compassion
- Support legal challenges, and
- Disrupt and resist.

Donations link via Detention Action

<https://detentionaction.org.uk/donate/>

Website for Allies for Justice

<https://detentionaction.org.uk/about-us/lived-experience-campaigning/>

SP 17/01/22

Attachment 2

City of Sanctuary

Over the years there have been sporadic discussions about whether Upper Wharfedale should become a 'Dale of Sanctuary' (like a City of Sanctuary - CoS) or whether individual organisations in the dale, such as businesses, churches or schools might.

Mostly, people have been happy to keep doing things in an ad hoc way and calling on other members of the network to help when the need arises. This has worked well and I think over the years we have managed a great deal.

However, some things have changed or will change, and we need to rethink about how we want to proceed.

As part of the Craven Refugee Support Network, we have organised a number of Zoom events on refugee matters – three so far. These events have been hosted and supported by City of Sanctuary staff, without whom we would not have been able to host them so professionally, or for so many attendees from across the area.

As many of you know, City of Sanctuary nationally has been very active in campaigning against the Nationality and Borders Bill. They have produced materials to support the campaign and frequently lobby parliamentarians and other politicians, faith groups and community organisations on the bill and on other issues affecting refugees and seekers of sanctuary.

Within Craven there are a number of 'sanctuary' organisations including Skipton Town Council and Bentham Area of Sanctuary. There are two Schools of Sanctuary – Upper Wharfedale secondary school is one of these, along with Glusburn primary school. The North Yorkshire Library Service is in the process of becoming a Library Service of Sanctuary.

With local government reorganisation in 2023 there will be different 'district' boundaries (whatever district will come to mean, if anything) and some affiliations will have to be rethought or reconnected to. It may be more appropriate for there to be a Craven District of Sanctuary, of which Upper Wharfedale would be a part along with Skipton and other areas.

So, everything considered, the time is probably right to canvass views again in Upper Wharfedale. I think, for a City of Sanctuary designation to have any meaning, there has to be a commitment to its philosophy and to be truly welcoming of refugees. We already have a good record on that. I also think that it is important to maintain a good level of community support. Their commitment is to "build a movement of welcome by supporting and encouraging sectors to embed solidarity, compassion and inclusion within their work."

The organisation pledge is here <https://data.cityofsanctuary.org/sign-an-organisation-pledge>

To help us think about this more and what it might involve, we (Craven) have asked Sara Trehwitt, CoS Operations Director and Regional Organiser for our area, to do an online presentation for us at the end of April where she will outline the different areas covered and answer any questions we may have. After the presentation we (UW and Craven) can form a view about what we might want to do and what the next steps might be.

I have attached a link to CoS for further information. I do hope you will sign up to the presentation (please email Angie Pedley on angie.pedley@gmail.com to register) on **April 28th at 7.30 pm**

<https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

<https://la.cityofsanctuary.org/>

Stella Perrott

Upper Wharfedale Refugee Support Group

February 2022

NO COUNTRY, NO MONEY, NOWHERE TO LIVE

Destitute Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK

What are the causes, what is being done, and how can we help?

A Zoom session with speakers from Abigail Housing, Beacon
and Red Cross, Bradford



Wednesday 30th March at 7.30pm



For Zoom link contact angie.pedley@gmail.com

Brought to you by: Skipton, Settle and Bentham Area Refugee Support Groups and supported by
City of Sanctuary



CRSN
Craven Refugee Support Network