



LEWES ORGANISATION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

www.losrras.org

Lewes Town Hall, Lewes, BN7 2QS – email: lgsrraslewes@gmail.com

Next Meeting: Film and talk

LOSRRAS has been invited to join the Depot in a showing of an Australian film,

Island of Hungry Ghosts on Wednesday 14 November at 6.00pm at the Depot

This vivid documentary, set on Christmas Island, explores the psychology of being on the move and away from home, and the trauma of detention.

Introduced by Thomas Austin (University of Sussex) and followed by a short talk by Jean Gould (LOSRRAS) and a Q & A.

Tickets are likely to sell out quickly, so book yours today!

Supporting local refugee families

LOSRRAS, in collaboration with Lewes Castle education programme, held a 'Lewes Castle Day' on August 29th. Planned as a summer holiday day out for local refugee families and their children, it provided a range of activities including a guided tour; film (with simultaneous translation); storytelling; dressing up; a craft workshop; and, most importantly, the chance for families to meet and chat. Thank you to all who helped before and on the day, particularly the excellent interpreters; it was a huge success.

More volunteer help needed

We are looking for new volunteers to help with local families, mainly in the Newhaven / Seaford / Peacehaven area. In particular we need people with experience of teaching maths and English to tutor adults and school-age children in their own homes. Most of the families we support are part of the UN Syrian Resettlement Programme and already have established groups of befrienders. However new families can arrive or be referred to us at short notice so we like to have some new volunteers to call on when the need arises. If you are interested or would like more details, please contact Jane Andrew (janeandrew953@gmail.com; 01273 478361).

LOSRRAS AGM : 3rd October 2018

The evening began with a talk by Mel Steel, the new Director of Voices in Exile - formerly Brighton VIE, set up in 2005. She outlined the challenges asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants have faced since then: legal aid cuts, violations of human rights, the 'hostile environment's' further restrictions, Brexit's effect on EEA migrants sparking a 'huge spike' in hate crime, big increases in NHS access fees, the on-going Syrian war bringing vulnerable families to the region. Apart from Brighton Housing Trust, VIE is the only other local provider of immigration advice.

The past year has meant significant changes for VIE: new premises in Kemptown, the rebuilding of advice capacity and the volunteer base of 40 with six staff. They provide a weekly drop-in service and co-ordinate the Syrian VPR Scheme facing another increase in new family arrivals.

VIE plan to develop ESOL provision, skills- building and social activities, migrant support delivered by users, mentoring and volunteering programmes and expansion of their outreach to Crawley and Hastings. A tall ask! Mel also stressed the additional funds that will be needed to appoint a legal aid assistant, envisaging some re-establishment of legal aid in the future.

The AGM followed. Enclosed are the draft AGM minutes, Chair's report, financial statement and LOSRRAS Annual Report 2017-18

Dates for your diary:

November 17 National unity demonstration against fascism and racism, supported by the TUC, sponsored by Unite Against Fascism and Love Music Hate Racism, assembling 12.00pm in central London, check tinyurl.com/SUTR18q

November 24 at All Saints Centre Lewes, 8.00 to 11.00pm. Charity gig for LOSRAS featuring Known Associates and Magowiji. It should be a great night. Any offers of help on the bar please, to Gill Lipson gill.lipson@talktalk.net

Unlocking Detention

6,000 people were detained in immigration removal centres during the last year. Despite the light shone on the arbitrary and cruel use of immigration detention by the exposure of the scandal of the Windrush generation, the use of indefinite detention without judicial oversight continues unabated and largely unrecognised. The work of organisations, like Refugee Tales, whose activities we support and publicise, do much to change that.



The umbrella organisation, *Detention Forum*, recently launched their annual 8-week 'virtual tour' of the immigration detention estate. This includes:

- Tweets to take you 'inside' the centre
- Blogs, videos, poems and other contributions from former detainees and their supporters
- On-line Q & A with someone who is or was detained

www.unlocked.org.uk

Stansted 15

The trial of the Stansted 15, a group of human rights defenders, began at Chelmsford Crown Court on 1 October. The group was arrested in March 2017 for non-violent resistance to the deportation of people from UK detention centres to Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone on a plane chartered by the Home Office. They are charged with "endangering safety at aerodromes" and face lengthy jail sentences. Amnesty International believe the charge has been brought about to discourage others from taking similar non-violent direct action in support of human rights. As Kate Allen, UK Director of Amnesty International states: "*We're concerned the authorities are using a sledgehammer to crack a nut with this case.*"

Amnesty has written to the Director of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Attorney General calling for the charge to be dropped. The case highlights the disturbing implications of the government's hostile environment policy:

"Human rights defenders are currently coming under attack in many countries around the world, with those in power doing all they can to discourage people from taking injustice personally. The UK must not go down that path." (Kate Allen, Amnesty International).

Urgently wanted:

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group needs men's clothes: warm hats and gloves (not scarves), trainers - sizes between 7 & 11, T-shirts S & M only, jeans - waist size 32 & 34 only, jogging bottoms - M & L only, jumpers/hoodies/fleeces - S&M only, warm coats/jackets - M & L only.

Collections at All Saints Centre, Friars Walk, Lewes, open Mon - Sat 9-11 am. Ring 01273 486391 for other times (if door shut, try office on the right side of the building). Please bring items in a carrier bag and put in black 'LOSRAS' box inside entrance. Contact Val or Arnold Simanowitz on 01273 480011 with any queries.

A tribute to John Jacobs, one of our founders

It is very sad to know that John Jacobs died on 28 September after a long illness.

John worked with Helen Ross and Joan Shall to set up LGSRAS 16 years ago. They felt increasing concern at the marginalisation and punitive treatment of refugees. At that time their particular concern was for refugees from the Balkans whose welfare on arrival was the responsibility of local authorities. This was highlighted in the 2001 annual Holocaust memorial event held at Sussex University in which John was always deeply involved.

He played a very constructive and helpful role in establishing this group, drawing on his many contacts. Members will recall too his practical contribution of an ingenious display stand for LGSRAS leaflets in the early Cliffe precinct stalls.

Steadfast in his commitment to justice and human rights, John will be remembered with much affection and respect.

Dividing Communities – border controls and the hostile environment

Since Teresa May coined the infamous phrase ‘hostile environment’ there have been two Immigration Acts, over 45,000 changes to the Immigration Rules and innumerable policy initiatives. The effect has been, not only to reduce rights, deter immigration and deny access to services, but also to introduce border controls within this country and to divide communities as migrants are increasingly ostracised within our society.

Although Sajid Javid has replaced ‘hostile’ with ‘compliant’ to describe the environment for immigrant communities, the new rhetoric doesn’t change reality. At the end of October a Guardian article found Home Office workers embedded in some local authorities, and uniformed officers attending sensitive interviews between destitute families and children’s social workers. This is an abuse of a law designed to protect and promote the welfare of children in need.

Liberty’s *Guide to the Hostile Environment, The Border Controls Dividing Our Communities* describes the impact, ‘By requiring frontline workers to check people’s immigration status or share data with the Home Office, government policies are shattering the carefully cultivated relationships of trust they have built with the communities they serve’.

As well as requiring schools, higher education institutions, the NHS, social care, children’s services, banks, landlords, the DVLA and employers to check people’s status, current laws impose data sharing requirements on public authorities, so they must collect, compile and report information to the Home Office. This erosion of trust between vulnerable groups of people and professionals, whose job it is to help them, can only serve to drive people underground and expose them to greater risks.

As well as public sector workers, landlords and employers are required to undertake immigration status checks or face criminal charges. Landlords can be fined up to £3,000 for failing to carry out checks and imprisoned for up to five years for letting property to someone without permission to enter or remain in the UK.

Unsurprisingly these measures lead to the targeting of BAME communities regardless of nationality or status. Research by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants found that 51% of landlords surveyed said that they were now less likely to consider letting to foreign nationals, and BAME British citizens who could not produce a passport were significantly more likely to be refused a property than a white British citizen with no passport.

Liberty concludes, ‘This country has become a place where parents fear sending their children to school, unwell people avoid seeking medical care for life threatening conditions and people sleeping rough hide from services that should exist to support them.’

Lift The Ban

Refugee Action, in coalition with more than 90 other charities, businesses, faith groups and trade unions have launched their Campaign to 'Lift The Ban' which forces asylum seekers into poverty.

Only those who have waited over 12 months for their Home Office decision have permission to work and then only in jobs on the extremely restrictive Shortage Occupation List. Meanwhile they are expected to exist on a daily handout of £5.39.

The Coalition is asking the Government to shorten the waiting time to six months and to abolish any job restriction. They estimate this could release about £42m into the UK economy. No other European country enforces a 12-month waiting period. In Canada asylum seekers are positively encouraged from the start to get into work, and not rely on social assistance. The fear of a pull factor to the UK for economic migrants falsely claiming asylum has been disproved by 29 academic studies, including one prompted by the Home Office.

A survey of 246 people with direct experience of the asylum process revealed that:

- 72% had not known of the ban before coming to the UK
- 94% would like to be able to work
- 52% had used a food bank in the previous year
- 74% had secondary level education or higher
- 37% at degree level - near the 42% for the UK as a whole.

NB: out of the 36 who had applied to work after 12 months eight were granted permission of whom two had found a job on the restricted list.

Refugee Action is particularly concerned that the ban means 'an influential early integration window' is missed; and the resultant loss of potential, confidence and dignity causes mental stress. They quote: '*...my identity is my job. If I can work, I can improve my life and I can help other people. I will be happy and confident.*'

'I don't want to rely on the Government's benefits - I want to work so I can prove myself to my children.'

'Without working you do feel you are useless.....sitting at home, it's stress and depression.'

71% of a wide cross section of the UK population agree that earlier permission to work would enable asylum seekers to integrate more effectively. The Lift The Ban Coalition is growing, it is developing projects to support individual asylum seekers and refugees maintain vital skills and gain access to jobs. It is taking the Campaign 'to the heart of party politics' resulting in the Labour Party's commitment to allow asylum seekers to work after 6 months and with no restriction on the type of employment.

For more information, and to sign the petition: refugee-action.org.uk

LOSRAS Annual Membership Subscriptions

The time has come again for annual membership renewal. Please see the **membership form enclosed** with this newsletter, and please do get them back to our new membership secretary, Belinda Kirby, as soon as possible. Fees are due at the end of December. If you joined the group after **April 2018**, you do **not** need to renew your membership, even if you have been sent a form.

LOSRAS aims to promote the welfare of refugees & asylum seekers in and beyond the Lewes District by:

- raising awareness of issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers
- providing practical help and responding to local issues as they arise
- advocating and lobbying to improve the rights of refugees and asylum seekers

Committee:

Chair: Jody Harris jody.harris@outlook.com

Treasurer: Tony Sims

Membership Secretary: Belinda Kirby 01273 474935, belinda.kirby@btinternet.com

Members: Jane Andrew, Alison Bell, Jean Gould, Jane Lancashire, Gill Lipson, Jane McIntosh, Annie Ralph, Gill Tipping