



## LEWES ORGANISATION IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

[www.losrras.org](http://www.losrras.org)

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### **Next Meeting: LOSRRAS AGM**

The AGM will take place on *Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2019* at 7.30 at Christ Church, Prince Edward's Road, Lewes (NB – change of date)

Movement 4 Movement, five students from London's Trinity Laban (including Lewes founder Lara Bligh Caplan) present their recent experience of taking music and dance to the refugee camps in Calais.

Followed by the AGM business: reports from the chair, membership secretary and treasurer; approval of bank and auditor, and election of two trustees.

*Nominations for election can be put in writing in advance of the AGM or orally at the meeting*

Hot and cold drinks will be available after the speakers and before the AGM business.

There is a car park at Christ Church and further street parking is available.

### **Our amazing fundraising stars**

This year two members and volunteers with LOSRRAS have undertaken extraordinary feats and raised over £2,500 in sponsorship money between them. Susie Ballentyne ran the Brighton 10k for LOSRRAS, and Jo Nixon swam 5k between Sweden and Finland crossing the Arctic Circle. Jo said, "*The Arctic swim was fantastic and pottering round Lapland's lakes and the Finnish archipelago even more lovely. Thank you all so much for helping me raise more than £2000 (4 times my target) I am now volunteering with LOSRRAS and can see how much difference your donations make to the families.*" A huge thank you to Susie and Jo.

### **Refugee Tales in Lewes**

Our collaboration with Refugee Tales this summer culminated in an event at Christ Church attended by well over 200 people. The tone of solidarity and welcome was set when arriving walkers were greeted warmly by Lewes a cappella choir Angels with Attitude. Our chair Jody Harris opened the event, followed by readings from David Herd (Prologue) and David Constantine – the beautiful and poignant Orphan's Tale. Actor Shobu Kapoor read The Applicant's Tale, written by F who has been helped by LOSRRAS, to whom she generously paid tribute in her tale. These tales and many more are available in Refugee Tales III published this summer by Comma Press – definitely recommended reading. Last but not least was a stunning performance by renowned Syrian oud player, Rihab Azar.

### **Foreign National Visitors Project**

After a hiatus of several years, LOSRRAS is once again able to provide visitors to foreign national prisoners and immigration detainees held in Lewes Prison. We have just completed negotiations with the prison and six volunteers will begin visiting in the coming months. The aim is to provide support to foreign national prisoners, particularly those who have no family or other support networks in the UK and those who are held under immigration powers awaiting deportation. Levels of self-harm among this group are significant and we hope that having a regular visitor will go some way to improve well-being.

Where possible we will refer cases to immigration lawyers, although unfortunately the effectiveness of this will be hampered both by the lack of legal aid for many areas of immigration work and the chronic shortage of specialist advice and representation. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer visitor please contact [jean.gould1@gmail.com](mailto:jean.gould1@gmail.com)

## Revised Home Office Domestic Abuse Guidance

Asylum seeking women and their children who need to leave a situation of domestic abuse can face enormous difficulties accessing safe accommodation and appropriate support.

The Home Office (HO) has recently published new *Domestic Abuse Guidance* for HO caseworkers to use when responding to reports of domestic abuse from people seeking asylum who receive (or who may be eligible for) accommodation and financial support from the HO.

The *Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP)* and the *Refugee Council (RC)* produced a joint research report ('Women seeking asylum: safe from harm in the UK?') and have worked closely with the HO to develop revised guidance. The HO has acted on the research recommendations with the very welcome result that its new guidance shows 'a number of significant improvements':

- A new HO funding mechanism *to allow asylum-seeking women to access specialist refuge accommodation*
- Expansion of the guidance *to include women not already receiving asylum support but who may be eligible*
- An HO commitment *to listen to and act on the views of women and the professionals working with them* when making decisions about what constitutes safe housing
- An HO commitment *to believing women* - rather than seeking corroborating evidence of domestic abuse
- An emphasis on *a quick response* which prioritises safety
- A commitment *to avoid using mixed sex hostel (initial) accommodation* as an emergency response
- A recognition of domestic abuse as *a gender-based form of violence disproportionately affecting women*
- Increased *role of the HO Safeguarding Team*

ASAP and the RC will work to communicate the new guidance to all relevant people and will monitor its implementation and feed back any issues to the HO.

## Home Office statistics, summarised by the Refugee Council, year ending March 2019

### *Permission to stay:*

17,304 people were granted asylum/ humanitarian protection/ other forms of leave or resettlement - the highest number since 2003. Many had waited some time to receive this result- just over a third of them on initial application. Subsequently about half of the appeals were accepted.

### *Children:*

40% of the above number were children. A further 687 were resettled under the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme. There were 3,223 applications from unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCS) - a third higher than last year. 55% of them were granted asylum with a further 11% allowed two and a half years to stay.

### *Immigration detention:*

21,423 people were imprisoned in immigration detention centres, the majority seeking asylum. Well over two thirds were subsequently released back into the community, highlighting the pointlessness of the system. Most are still awaiting decisions on their asylum applications.

## 'Violence by design'

In March we described the work of the Permanent People's Tribunal, an alternative court with a jury comprising eminent academics, lawyers and trade unionists. They heard evidence about the impact of the UK Government's 'hostile environment' policies and, unsurprisingly, published a damning verdict. They found an environment which facilitates and perpetuates racism and cruelty. The jury concluded, among other things, that policies that are bad for migrants are also bad for UK citizens, for example using refugees as 'guinea pigs' for harsh policies that are later applied more generally, e.g. the dispersal of homeless families.

Chair of the jury, Professor Bridget Anderson: 'During the hearings we saw how the shameful hostile environment policy has legitimised racism and fostered a toxic social environment. Jury members commended the courage of witnesses who appeared before us, and the commitment of migrants' organisations who participated. They are building a world that is better for everyone.'

## **Dates for your diary:**

We are very fortunate to have Margaret Fingerhut give a fund raising recital for LOSRAS. As a concerto soloist, Margaret has appeared with all the UK's major orchestras, and she is frequently heard on BBC Radio 3, Classic FM and radio stations worldwide. Margaret is a Visiting Lecturer at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire where she was awarded an Honorary Fellowship in 2015.

In 2019, Margaret embarked on a special piano recital series working with City of Sanctuary to raise money to support refugees in the UK. The history of classical music is full of composers who left their homelands because of war, political upheaval or fear of persecution and Margaret's concert tells the stories of some of these composers through their piano music. 'Far from the Home I Love' is designed to give a cultural context to the theme of migration and resonates with the current climate of troubled attitudes towards refugees and those in exile. Margaret's programme includes works by Chopin, Grieg, Handel, Haydn, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov. She has also commissioned a new piece by Arian, the Kurdish Syrian composer who wrote the Refugee Nation Anthem for the 2016 Olympics.

The recital is Saturday October 19<sup>th</sup> at 3 pm, St Andrew's Church, The Tye, Alfriston.

Refreshments will be available after the concert.

Tickets priced £12 are available on the door or from Eventbrite:

[www.eventbrite.com/e/far-from-the-home-i-love-tickets-69761497517](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/far-from-the-home-i-love-tickets-69761497517)

## **Amnesty letter writing for refugees**

Lewes Amnesty Group is holding a letter writing session in support of refugees on Tuesday September 10th from 6-7.30pm at The Depot. LOSRAS members are encouraged to come along.

## **A full investigation into abuse at Brook House Detention Centre**

Two years ago BBC's Panorama exposed levels of abuse at Gatwick's Brook House (BH) Immigration Removal Centre including violent racist verbal assaults, threatening, degrading and taunting behaviour towards detainees and, most shockingly, the near strangulation of a highly disturbed young asylum seeker. G4S suspended the very worst offenders caught on camera and the Government responded by promising an investigation. After considerable prevarication the Home Secretary asked the prisons ombudswoman to investigate.

Two men who had been detained at BH at the time were brave enough to mount a legal challenge to the Home Secretary's decision. They argued that the powers of the proposed investigation were inadequate, because they did not meet the requirements of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights - the right not to be subjected to torture, inhumane and degrading treatment. Their lawyers said that the Home Secretary could only meet their duties under human rights law by holding a thorough inquiry where witnesses such as the suspended staff were compelled to attend and where victims of the abuse were represented and able to participate. As things stand the prison ombudswoman does not have powers to make either of those things happen. An investigation where the worst perpetrators were not cross-examined and the victims' voices were not heard would be a breach of their human rights.

The High Court judge readily accepted that the treatment shown on film amounted to torture and agreed that the Home Secretary's proposals were inadequate and breached his duties under Article 3. The Home Secretary appealed and the Court of Appeal has just refused permission for the appeal to go ahead, so the new Home Secretary will have to set up a far more rigorous inquiry into what was going on at Brook House in 2017. It's cheering to have some positive news right now, and a public investigation is likely to generate more impetus to end indefinite immigration detention.

On that note, many of you will have received a message from Maria Caulfield MP to say that she supports the introduction of a time limit to immigration detention. She came to speak to the Refugee Tales walkers as we set out from the Depot on the second day of this year's walk, and reiterated her message of support. Maria Caulfield's subsequent interview, in which she acknowledged the work of LOSRAS in this area, is on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVBqfMPB3uI&feature=youtu.be>

## **Book Review: ‘Working with asylum seekers and refugees: What to do, what not to do, and how to help’ by Sarah Crowther.**

I found this a clear, accessible and practical book. The author (who has been supporting those working with asylum seekers and refugees for 15 years) contends that it is incumbent upon statutory and voluntary organisations to address migrants' practical and psychological needs, and that the work should not be confined to over-subscribed specialist refugee organisations. This book aims to educate workers in these organisations as well as activists and/or volunteers. Crowther stresses that each refugee is a unique individual, ordinary yet in extraordinary circumstances, and that almost all of them have to negotiate a bewildering bureaucracy in our present hostile environment. Many are beset by financial, health, housing, employment and language problems as well as by psychological difficulties.

Once here, it is extraordinarily difficult to apply for refugee status or even just survive. This area is a minefield, flooded with complex, legalistic and disheartening steps before an asylum seeker has a chance of building a case and getting a decision about gaining refugee status. 64% fail the first time. Crowther covers all this in great detail (with boxes giving specific examples) and comprehensive appendices and glossaries. Even for those of us with experience, there is much to learn and I am sure this book would be invaluable to befrienders, mentors or any other workers in this field.

## **Work Opportunities for young people at Enthum House**

Enthum House Foundation, a safe and sustainable home to unaccompanied asylum seeking children aged 16-18, aims to empower young people and encourage and facilitate independence, self-reliance and integration into local communities and UK society as a whole. Some of the current young people will soon be ready to move on and the next phase is to support their transition to independent living. We would like to offer them the opportunity to experience as many different areas of work as possible to help them make decisions regarding their future careers. So we are asking LOSRAS members whether they, or any of their contacts, might be willing to allow these young people to spend a little time with them at their place of work to give them a better understanding of how different industry sectors work. The next step would then be to assist them in getting paid part-time work, so any information about companies that might be able to offer such work, would be gratefully received.

If you think you could help, please contact Jane Lancashire on 07703 460180

## **Request for donations:**

**1. East Hoathly Village of Sanctuary** are planning a nearly new sale fundraiser with Prosecco and nibbles in November. Funds go to local and international groups working with refugees. They are collecting nearly new women's clothes, hand bags, shoes and other accessories. *Women's items only*. Please contact Katherine Gutkind on [kg616775@gmail.com](mailto:kg616775@gmail.com)

**2. Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group** currently needs men's trainers, size 7 – 11, baseball caps, belts, ties, shorts, lightweight jackets, jeans (32 -36" waist only), jogging bottoms and rucksacks. 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 'LOSRRAS' box inside entrance. Contact Val or Arnold Simanowitz on 01273 480011 with any queries.

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## **LOSRRAS 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 [info@losrras.org](mailto:info@losrras.org)

**Treasurer:** Tony Sims

**Membership Secretary:** Belinda Kirby 01273 474935, [belinda.kirby@btinternet.com](mailto:belinda.kirby@btinternet.com)

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