

DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT

THE SUN IS OUT

With warmer weather comes an increased timetable at DCRS that is all made possible by our volunteers. We are grateful to have over 40 talented and dedicated volunteers who are helping to deliver our activities program, English classes, assist at drop-ins, and interpret amongst various other roles.

DONATING & FUNDRAISING

Are you running a marathon, hosting a coffee & cake morning or simply wanting to fundraise for a good cause this year and want to support a local, grassroots charity? We always welcome anyone wanting to fundraise for us.

We also have a new initiative for anyone wanting to donate regularly (every month or every quarter for example) or to a specific project we are running. To find out more about fundraising and regular donations contact;

finance@dcrs-plymouth.org

Over the last three months we have:

- Seen 676 people at our face-to-face drop in
- Answered 146 calls on our casework triage line
- Responded to 177 WhatsApp enquiries

SANCTUARY SCHOLARSHIPS

Every year Plymouth University offers three asylum seekers or refugees a course place through the Sanctuary Scholarship. After a long interview process, two of our service users will be starting their undergraduate courses in September 2023! They will be studying Cyber Security and Illustration. A massive congratulations for their amazing achievement and the best of luck with their academic endeavours.

ACTIVITIES

Every summer we see the positive impact nature has on general wellbeing. The activities this year are all about exploring green and blue spaces. Canoeing, beach trips, sailing, and hikes are just some of what we have on offer. Our Creative Club (running every Friday) is also embracing the outdoors by exploring Plymouth through the lense of a camera. Like last year, we are continuing to work with organisations such as Reclaim the Sea, Fotonow and Southwest Coast Path Association to deliver these activities.

SAM'S DAY

On 26th April DCRS staff, volunteers and service users, past and present, came together to celebrate the life of our founder, Sam Kallon. 20 years on from his passing, we shared food, dancing, music and heard stories of Sam from his family and friends. We remembered his life's work and continue in his stead to create a fair, humane and safe asylum experience for all.





LEGAL AID DESERT

It is well-known that Southwest is a legal aid desert.

There are currently only two legally aided immigration advisors in the Devon & Cornwall region. With over 1,000 asylum seekers currently accommodated in Devon, there is a severe and chronic lack of representation and is one of the most common obstacles our service users come up against. Last month, a large law firm based in Bristol, that represented many asylum seekers from Devon & Cornwall, stopped its legal aid contract due to no longer being economically viable.

With a growing backlog of asylum cases and the Legal Aid Agency not adjusting its rates since 2008, it is becoming less attractive for law firms to renew their Legal Aid contracts.

To be a legal representative for an asylum claim an OISC Level 2 qualification or above is compulsory. We have been registered as a Level 1 OISC organisation for many years. Now, our caseworkers are working towards gaining their Level 2 Asylum and Protection OISC certification to increase capacity in the Devon & Cornwall region. While much of our work often focuses on dealing with consequences of a system not fit for purpose, we are aiming to be part of the solution by providing much needed immigration advice, advocacy and representation in the coming months.

REFUGEE WEEK 2023

Alongside DCRS, Plymouth University, Plymouth Hope, START, Calstock Refugee Outreach Group, Red Cross and Give Back are hosting an activity-filled week to celebrate Refugee Week from the 17th to the 23rd of June. Every year cities around the UK celebrate the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary through art and culture. We welcome you to join us at Abbey Hall in Plymouth on 22nd June between 1 and 3.30pm to share a feast from around the world and learn more about our work. The Plymouth calendar is available on our website or social media if you would like to get involved with the other events on offer.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Camilla - I have been a caseworker at DCRS since January 2021, starting out as a volunteer in 2019, initially helping with the activities programme, and then as an auxiliary caseworker. I left a job in academia (as a lecturer in English Literature) because, after volunteering with DCRS, I felt drawn to utilise my skills in a more socially impactful way. My job is very varied and includes helping our service users with destitution and asylum support, housing issues, finding solicitors, and working towards fresh claims.

Asylum casework can be challenging, exasperating and extremely rewarding. As caseworkers, we witness the parameters of our job shift almost daily, when the Home Office and other government departments create or amend laws that directly affect our service users and our ability to support them. It is heart-breaking to see the ways in which the 'hostile environment' harms people, often for reasons which are arbitrary and unnecessary. However, we encounter small (and sometimes big!) moments of hope every day, and there is always a lot of laughter, and even joy, to be found at our centre.

