

DEVON AND CORNWALL REFUGEE SUPPORT



ACTIVITIES

Alongside Creative Club, the summer season has provided ample opportunity for picnics on the Hoe, walks along the South West Coast Path, trips to Whitsand beach, canoeing up the River Dart, and voyaging out to sea with Sailing Tectona.

Following on from the successful collaboration with Reclaim the Sea (RTS) in 2022, they have expanded to have a women and men's programme this year. Rebecca Van Der Veer, one of our caseworkers and Co-Director of RTS, has shared some of the words from the women who participated this year:

'I enjoyed every bit of it. When there is someone who cares about you and always surrounding you with this great positive energy, they will help you to achieve your dreams and goals. I have been dreaming to swim ever since I was a child, and this opportunity has made this dream come true'

'Every Saturday has been a little adventure for me. Before this I did not go swimming, because I was scared of the water. Now I go swimming every Sunday and I am not afraid, I perceive the sea as a friend'

'It was really enjoyable, I found many friends here'
'It was unforgettable'

CREATIVE CLUB

Merrydith, a PhD student at Plymouth University, has taken the lead on the Creative Club the past few months and has been organising photography trips, puppet making classes, painting sessions and a tour of the Archives at The Box Museum in Plymouth, amongst many other exciting projects. The Creative Club have now moved permanently to a new space - The Box has generously provided the club with a room every Friday afternoon. As one of the newest attractions to Plymouth, it is a great way to introduce Asylum Seekers to the city.

OISC

OISC, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, oversees and regulates professionals giving advice on entering or staying in the UK. It is important that our case workers are OISC qualified, so the advice they give is correct.

In the previous edition of our newsletter, we discussed the ramifications of the Southwest's 'Legal Aid Desert' and how we are looking to help provide solutions. Since then, two members of staff have passed the Asylum and Protection Level 2 exam. We are not planning to expand to providing Level 2 work straight away, but this brings our organisation one step closer to being able to provide the much needed legal provision for asylum seekers in the South West.

Later this year, other caseworkers will be taking their Level 1 OISC Immigration exam to ensure we are giving the most up to date advice.



THE BEFRIENDER PROJECT

At the beginning of the year, our activities co-ordinator Suvi piloted The Befriender Project with the aim of reducing social isolation and creating more opportunities for integration into the Plymouth community. Following its success, Suvi has secured funding to allow the pilot to continue and grow. There are many examples around the UK, with asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups, where befriending projects can have a profound and positive impact on someone's life. We are hoping that our project can make a new place feel a bit more like home. Suvi is starting to train a new cohort of befrienders from next month. If you would like to get involved, please contact us using the details on our website.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Alex Miranda has been an integral part of the DCRS for eight years. Sadly, she will be leaving us this October. Here are her reflections on her time at DCRS:



So much has changed since I joined DCRS eight years ago: on the world stage, in national policy and within DCRS itself. Many national changes have worked against asylum seekers fleeing conflict or persecution, and the 'hostile environment' has become further entrenched, as asylum seekers are used as a political football and the individual becomes an inconvenient statistic.

I am happy, however, that changes at DCRS have been very positive in response to the growing challenges facing our Service Users, and the scope of our activity has increased to meet the growing need. The Covid pandemic was an appalling crisis, but it prompted changes to the delivery of our services and taught us to reflect on our practice and to work smarter.

Over the past eight years there have been lots of changes of staff, volunteers and trustees; the evolution continues, and the team is growing, always underpinned by a strong commitment to do our best for our Service Users. We can't solve all the problems, but I'm very proud of my colleagues, who are a tenacious bunch, and never give up!

It has often been a stressful and emotionally draining job, but I feel very privileged to have been able to work alongside an amazing, supportive and dedicated team, and to have met many incredible people, who have so much to offer this country. DCRS has taught me so much and I am excited to be taking that knowledge to work for the Caritas Plymouth Refugee and Migrant Project.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Michelle started volunteering with us earlier this year. Over the summer, she has taken a group of women to swimming lessons every Friday which has now become its own social swimming club! This is what she has to say about her time so far:

"I am a happy and proud member of the DCRS volunteer team, where I dedicate my time to help the community. The entire DCRS team is exceptionally welcoming and supportive, always ready to assist me in overcoming any challenges. This is an environment I cherish, and I genuinely relish my volunteer work. I eagerly anticipate my volunteering day every week; it has become my favourite day of the week. The abundance of love, kindness, and goodwill within this organization is truly heartwarming. "



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