

## REFUGEE WEEK DIARY

### Monday

One of the young asylum seekers we support is starting school this morning. The bravery and resilience of these young people is inspiring – I find it hard to imagine walking in to a school knowing no one and not speaking the language. But R is just so excited to be going to school as she has been out of education for almost a year. She is a very talented artist so we have been providing her with some art materials to help support her emotional wellbeing while she waits for a school place. We have also helped her to find the right uniform and to navigate the school induction process.

We will send her a good luck WhatsApp message this morning and be thinking of her. Her cheerfulness and kindness to her family has touched many of the HWR volunteers.

### Tuesday

We have organised a session for 16-19 year olds at the local Services For Young People Centre. They will get a chance to bake scones and to find out more about local youth services. Many young asylum seekers are isolated from their peer group and are waiting for college courses to start in September. A team of four HWR volunteers will walk with the group to show them the route and to introduce them to the SFYP team.

Tuesday is also the day for one of our regular drop-in sessions for refugees and asylum seekers where we offer free ESOL classes, mindful activities and signposting to local advice services.

### Wednesday

The 16-19 year olds will be signing up for College places today so we will send WhatsApp messages to confirm and explain arrangements. The young people are highly motivated to be in education and have positive plans for their future.

Wednesday is also a day where we might run activities like cooking sessions or wellbeing walks. There is a heavy emotional burden for asylum seekers and we try to signpost to local free activities or to organise events ourselves. Many asylum seekers would love to work and feel more connected to the local community. Many wait months, or even years, for their cases to be looked at.

### Thursday

Today we are meeting with wonderful local NHS colleagues to discuss the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers. For one family recently, Mum's waters broke at 35 weeks and she was rushed into hospital. Dad and 3 year old son had no means of going to visit in hospital and the family only had one working phone between them. Dad was so worried and felt so helpless. Volunteers delivered a spare phone and took dad in for visits until mum and her beautiful baby daughter were discharged. We also ordered a baby box from the Alternatives Crisis Pregnancy Charity. We work with many amazing local charities and organisations to support these vulnerable families who are so far from friends and family.

### Friday

We have a long-standing drop-in session on Fridays for refugees and asylum seekers, hosted and supported by a wonderful local Church. Asylum seekers are not allowed to sign up for formal English classes until they have been in the UK for at least 6 months. This is intensely frustrating for newly arrived refugees who are desperate to learn English. HWR delivers volunteer-led English classes across the County and these classes are open to all, regardless of arrival date. Many asylum seekers are highly motivated to improve their English and are very diligent students.

Asylum seekers are also generally not allowed to work, so they might come to our drop-ins for help finding local volunteering opportunities, assistance with filling in forms or simply for a friendly chat. Every asylum seeker is an individual person with individual needs so we have a great team of volunteers supporting in many different ways.