



Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK SUMMER 2020

accompany • serve • advocate

“May the hearts of those who have enough, be open to filling the empty hands of those who do not have the bare necessities.”

— Pope Francis —

Refugee Week 2020 – ‘Imagine’

Running from 15-21 June, the first-ever virtual Refugee Week is an invitation to come together across borders and distance to celebrate our interconnectedness and imagine a different world. JRS is joining with people across the UK, and the world, to do one (or more) of eight Simple Acts: everyday actions we can all do to stand with refugees and make new connections in our communities. All can be done at home, and all are inspired by the theme ‘**imagine**’.



Will you join us in doing a Simple Act?

Whether you plan an event or activity yourselves, join a JRS activity, or take part in an activity in your own community, you'll be joining a big, creative, collective movement to imagine a better world.

1. Join a virtual event

The Pope, the pandemic and the people we leave behind: Austen Ivereigh and Sarah Teather in conversation for Refugee Week

Join **Sarah Teather**, Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service UK and Pope Francis biographer and journalist, **Austen Ivereigh**, for a special refugee week conversation, reflecting on the issues COVID has thrown up for the Church and its care for the most marginalised. What can we learn from Francis' leadership about how the Church should respond? How is the Church responding on the ground to the issues facing refugees and migrants during the pandemic? What lessons can we learn from both as we *re-imagine* the future?

When: Thursday 18 June 2020, 6:30 pm

Where: Online

Register: e-mail Megan to register your attendance – megan.knowles@jrs.net

2. Read a piece from the JRS Digital Anthology

Throughout refugee week, JRS will be releasing writings from the JRS community – refugees, and volunteers. Have a read and share with your friends and community:

www.jrsuk.net/refugeeweek2020

3. Pray with JRS

Join JRS in prayer to St Alban – the patron Saint of Refugees – as we ask for his intercessions.

Saint Alban, you gave us an example of hospitality by opening your home to one in need and, as a result of this encounter, were completely changed.

We ask that through your intercession we may be given the courage to offer help to those who are forced to flee their homes in search of safety.

We ask that in accompanying others as you did we may encounter God in a new way.

Saint Alban, Patron of Refugees, pray for us and all refugees around the world.

Amen



Prayer cards available on www.jrsuk.net/praying-with-refugees, or by e-mailing uk@jrs.net

Don't miss out on more news!

As JRS UK amplifies its work to accompany refugees and advocate for the rights for those living destitute or in detention, please remember to visit our website for the latest news and blogs. Find out what JRS UK are working on during the lockdown, read reflections from staff, volunteers and refugee friends, and find out how you can help our mission today.

Visit www.jrsuk.net/news and www.jrsuk.net/blog today.

Message from the Director



So much has happened since I last wrote to you. The Coronavirus pandemic has changed everyone's lives and we have had to move rapidly at JRS to adapt and then respond to the situation of emergency it created for our refugee friends.

Along with others, we have had to close our face-to-face services temporarily to limit infection spread. Shutting the doors of the Day Centre was a difficult moment. As an organisation whose mission of accompaniment is so much about closeness to refugees, having to shut the space where we gather, form friendships and create community was painful, knowing how much refugee friends would suffer as a result.

But quickly we regrouped. Thanks to the partnerships we had built up with others over years, we were able to source food at a point when supermarket shelves were empty, and new

volunteers responded to our appeal for help, with packing parcels and driving to deliver them to refugee friends who would otherwise go hungry. We also began to provide mobile phone top-ups too and then to roll out a new prepaid MasterCard to get hardship grants out safely.

Our advice and support services have been under huge demand as many refugee friends found themselves street homeless for the first time when precarious living arrangements broke down. But with care, consistency and attention, we have had successes, getting friends referred in to new public schemes providing support.



Sarah leaving the Day centre, car loaded with essential food and toiletries for refugee friends living in East London.

It has been a huge undertaking for our small staff team who are all working from home. I'm proud of the courage of the younger staff especially, who have been faithful to our mission, and sought creative ways to respond. And as ever, I am deeply inspired by our refugee friends themselves, who in the face of huge difficulty find ways to survive and care for others.

I hope this edition of *Together* sheds a light on some of the way the pandemic has affected refugee friends and gives you a glimpse of our work to respond. I am hugely grateful to the support and generosity of our supporters who make all of our work possible. Truly you accompany us in our efforts to accompany refugees, ensuring they are not forgotten.

With grateful thanks,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S Teather".

Sarah Teather, Director

Emergency response to the coronavirus lockdown

Destitution Services

While friendship and solidarity is key to accompanying refugee friends, practical support and advice plays a crucial part in the Destitution team's mission to accompany.

Without meeting our friends at the Day Centre, the Destitution team has quickly responded to the lockdown by retrieving contact details for almost 300 of our refugee friends. Staying in touch, and ensuring friends that we are still supporting them, has provided a lifeline for refugee friends we accompany.

What brings Cristina, our Destitution Services Manager, joy during the pandemic?

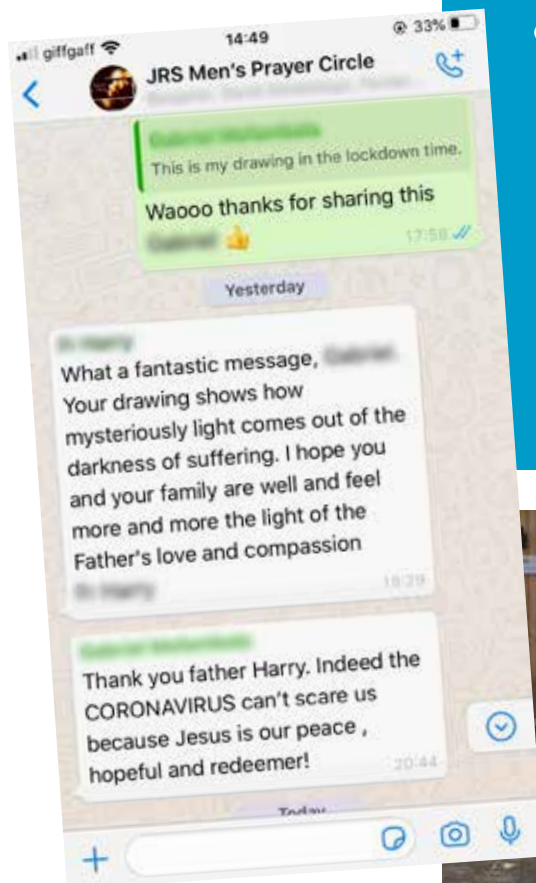
"The support of volunteers to help JRS reach as many refugees in need as possible. Their generosity is overwhelming."

Emergency Response Team

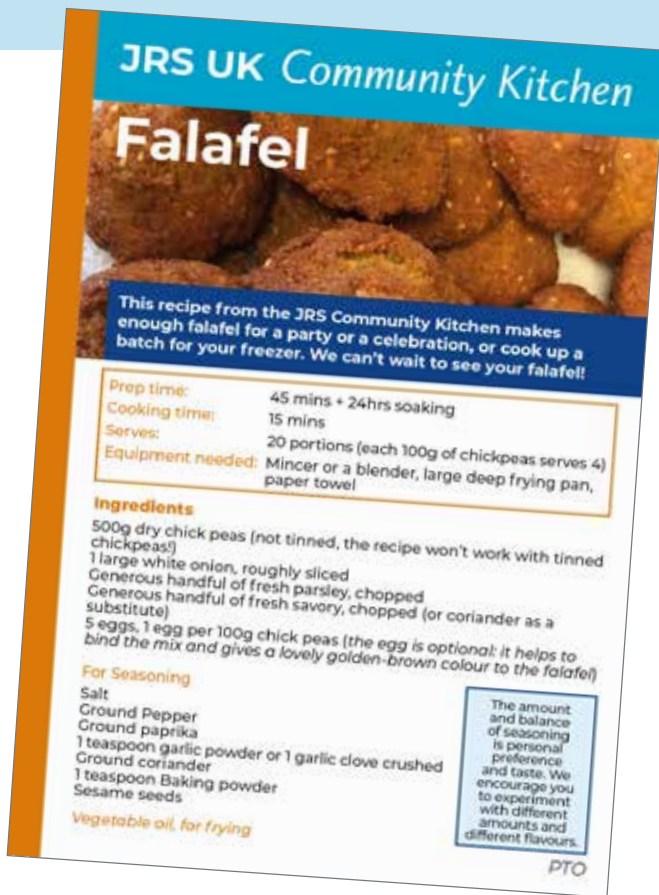
We quickly realised that to remotely coordinate support services and essential deliveries across Greater London, an emergency response team, made up of Destitution caseworker, Jasmine, Operations Assistant, Richard and Team coordinator, Rhiannon, would be necessary.

Between them, scores of volunteers have been recruited and deployed to help:

- **maintain** up to date contact information for more than **290** refugee friends in order to stay in touch
- **drive 431** parcels of food and toiletries to all corners of London
- **distribute** hardship grants to assist **268** friends with essential needs and fresh produce
- **top up 201** mobile phones with a month's worth of credit
- **provide** over-the-phone emotional support on a regular basis during an isolation period to **80** refugees



Our hosting scheme coordinator Naomi and new volunteer Azalea ready to deliver parcels and hardship grants to refugee friends. Naomi and Azalea share a flat together.



What brings joy to Dallya since JRS activities have gone virtual?

“Seeing our friends on WhatsApp find joy in each other’s company and kind messages to one another.

“Try out my enclosed falafel recipe which I shared with our refugee friends!”



Each week, up to 4 volunteers are on the road with at least 4 deliveries of food and toiletries for our refugee friends.

Emotional support

A network of over 140 volunteers, working from their respective homes, have mobilised a new support system to our refugee friends, offering befriending and emotional support at the end of the phone. Whether they are living destitute in London or are feeling the weight of uncertainty around their immigration status, encouraging conversations and the lending of time are making a world of difference to the lives of refugee friends.



Volunteer Jenny helps reach more refugee friends by making deliveries on her bike!

Detention support

As the impact of coronavirus took hold, the detention estate across the UK rapidly changed. All external visits were suspended and many have been released from detention, though hundreds remain detained. Those released now face new challenges as they adapt to life under social distancing and those still detained are more isolated than ever.

There is now a dedicated group of 17 volunteers who are supporting up to 48 people recently released from, or still in, detention, through phone conversations offering company, a listening ear and, for those who want, counselling following a traumatic and hostile experience in detention.

What brings joy to Will, our Detention Outreach officer, since working from home?

“One refugee friend has made clear how much it means to him knowing he has someone who is always there who he can talk to over the phone, as he is held in detention. For me it really reinforced our mission and why we do what we do.”

Venerable Volunteers

Longstanding volunteers, and recently recruited ones, have been an important part of the emergency response to the coronavirus. Here is an insight into what Jackie, a venerable day centre volunteer, and Azalea, a new pair of helping hands, have seen since helping JRS' delivery scheme.



Jackie: Parcel volunteer

Why are you volunteering for JRS?

"I just feel that our refugee friends in lockdown do not have the capacity to contact local resources to get essentials delivered to them. And that I don't have the money to pay neighbours to go to the shops for them. They don't have any cash.

"I have been volunteering with JRS for years, picking up donated food from local retailers and helping at the Thursday Day Centre, and it carries on right now. It's a just continuation of my regular Thursday commitment, but I'm here four days a week!"

What have you been doing?

"I pack bags of food and toiletries every day. We've been donated food from local food banks, so I'm unpacking crates and making up bags of essentials to last them a week or so. Tinned food, and I always add a little treat or surprise: biscuits, chocolates or crisps.

"I have to be careful with what I put in. Certain people I can't give certain things to."

"The unfortunate thing is, with the Food Bank you can't specify and there is a language barrier for some of our friends. They can't necessarily translate products with English instructions. That makes it quite hard."

Jackie knows many of our refugee friends personally from being at JRS for years. She knows who has kids, who might have particular dietary requirements, and which foods they will know how to eat. As much as she can she is helping to provide our friends with what they need most. Jackie even included a magazine for a friend who likes to read!

What would you want supporters to know?

"We need donations please – big and small they all help."

.....

Azalea: Food and parcel delivery driver

Why did you volunteer as a driver?

"I had lots of spare time. I work in events and production, and so work has been quiet for me since the lockdown. I'm not working, and volunteering is a reason to get out of the house, and feel like I'm spending a difficult time purposefully.



"It's easy to let time fly by under these circumstances and feel like you haven't accomplished anything. This was a way to help.

"I worked with refugees some years ago in Calais, for an extended period."

What have you noticed whilst on the road delivering essentials to refugees?

"Staying 2 metres apart from someone you are visiting is actually quite a long way!

"Many of the refugees I have dropped off food to are quite lonely, especially at the moment – you can tell when someone wants to have a little chat, it's mostly about the weather, just small talk, but it's nice to be able to offer that to them.

"One other thing that is interesting, which I have spoken to my friends about is that it's surprising to see how interspersed the refugee friends are. In London, so many different people live in the same place, and so it really amplifies the inequality between people, there is such an obvious divide in living conditions. I've been thinking about that quite a lot.

"In terms of delivering parcels, the refugees are all very grateful and happy to have human contact, and it's a positive experience."

Message from a Refugee Friend

In celebration of Refugee Week, one of our friends shares an excerpt of a poem he wrote inspired by a dream, coupled with his own experiences as an asylum seeker in the UK.

The Future Message

I had this vision last night,
That human beings, gonna get a fight.

....

I had to run for my life.

....

Robots are about!
They want to get you out!

The system building a future,
It's not by God or nature,

It's a mechanistical future
Controlled by machine and robots.
So be careful how you go about,
Robots are taking over.

The world is changing,
Man is not kind anymore,
Man gets mean like a machine,
Can't feel,
While machines are taking over the scene.

Humans got to think
Before they get extinct.
No matter how it looks, take a good look.

This vision I had last night,
I had to put up a terrible fight,
I had to run for my life.
Knowing, I just got to stay alive.
Never let your heart go astray,
Your eyes deceiving your mind
Leading you in the wrong way.

The whole world is at a change,
Even the landmarks are changing,
Life itself is changing.
Doesn't even call a Brother, "Brother",
Now calls hum "Uncle",
Putting distance between each other.

So man, get mean, and and be kind to your
brother man.
This vision I had
It was awful and sad.
These two pretty girls I met,
Tried to get me in their net,
Not knowing that robots are about
Trying to push human beings out.

So be careful,
Never let "pretty looks" fool you!!!
Robots are the future, and they are about,
To get you out!!

– Easton

Read the full poem by visiting
www.jrsuk.net/refugeeweek2020

Hardship Fund appeal



The Refugee Friends' Hardship Fund was established in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak and the lockdown in the UK. Without being able to meet our refugee friends to provide urgent practical, legal and emotional support, or share a warm meal at the day centre, our team knew that accompaniment was crucial now more than ever.

Getting hardship funds to refugee friends

One of the main methods of support JRS UK has always provided to those we serve is cash hardship grants at our Thursday Day Centre—for bus passes and one-off grants for specific needs e.g. education materials, baby items or supporting special dietary needs.

Bus passes would allow for our refugee friends to travel to other places for food at a local soup kitchen, church or mosque. When COVID-19 first took hold of life in the UK, one of the first pieces of advice the public and retailers were given was to limit the use of cash as much as possible to reduce the risk of transmission, as

well as discourage use of public transport. While this is the right advice, for our refugee friends this made a difficult situation untenable. Part of the many existing restrictions placed upon the lives of destitute refugees is they have no access to private transport or any form of contactless payment, such as a credit card or bank account.

While the world awaits the passing of the health crisis, our refugee friends are still experiencing many difficulties from living destitute or in detention. The effects of social distancing, remote working and the temporary closure of face-to-face services have left refugees feeling

even more isolated and afraid, and more in need of practical support.

Thanks to people like you, the Hardship Fund has raised more than £20,000. But the need continues amongst our refugee friends, for as long as the lockdown continues, and beyond.

By donating today, you will help us to fund our Emergency Response Team which continues this vital support every month:

- **Distributing emergency hardship grants** through our new prepaid contactless MasterCard, getting funds to people safely, so they don't need to use cash
- **Delivering food parcels** – those with little money cannot afford to do 'big shops' or buy in bulk, they need essential food
- **Distributing mobile phone top-ups** to combat the isolation, wherever possible
- **Delivering toiletries for hygiene** and to help combat the virus
- **Offering proactive phone support**, reaching out to isolated refugee friends, including those in immigration detention, connecting them with our team of staff and volunteers to provide updates, friendship and advice
- **Providing legal advice** for their case via our dedicated legal team, over the phone, email, and post; continuing to move forward their claims and clarifying their access to other services in this difficult time
- **Helping our most vulnerable friends**, due to age and health, avoid street homeless and shield themselves from the spread of the virus through advice, referrals and support
- **Providing ongoing support to hosts** in our *At Home* scheme who are currently housing a refugee friend who would otherwise be homeless
- **Finding new creative ways** to connect and maintain a sense of community with our refugee friends over the phone

To adequately accompany refugees with practical and emotional assistance, JRS rely on the generosity of donors to raise funds and the prayers of many.

Our refugee friends have little or no money to spend on immediate necessities, let alone plan ahead for the uncertain weeks to come. Join JRS UK and stand side by side with some of the most vulnerable in our community.



How will we continue to support our friends?

We know our food parcels will only go so far, and mostly contain long-life food. We were determined to facilitate access to fresh food, and culturally specific foods. We needed a way to get hardship funds to people quickly safely and securely.

The JRS team have now secured a pre-paid MasterCard for each of the refugees we support. JRS staff have delivered them across London and explained how to use them. Now refugee friends can receive top ups of grants from JRS to buy fresh food, personal needs and in many cases, crafts for their child.

This service is not a bank account, but a means to give our friends some agency and freedom to purchase what they need most that week.

We hope you might want to help ensure we can provide fortnightly £15 top-ups so that our friends can buy essentials.

To donate visit www.jrsuk.net/hardshipfund | call 020 7488 7321 or fill in the enclosed form and return in the provided envelope



Advocating for Status for All

At the start of May, JRS UK wrote to the Prime Minister, with the support of over 20 other organisations, calling for Status For All: we request a period of leave to remain for everyone with insecure immigration status – including those seeking asylum and those whose claims have been refused – due to the pandemic.

We felt this was a vitally important ask because we have seen just how vulnerable our refugee friends are in the context of COVID-19. Being made destitute by the asylum system, they have no accommodation in which to stay safe, socially distance, and if necessary self-isolate; though the government has attempted to accommodate rough-sleepers, immigration status sadly continues to act as a barrier in many cases; the NHS charging regime makes it hard to access healthcare at a time when that's desperately needed. The structures designed to create a hostile environment for people in our friends' position have always been destructive – and this is even more dangerous and counterproductive in the context of the pandemic.

We were really pleased to get a lot of press coverage when we released the letter. It was covered in the Observer and the Tablet, and

supported by both Catholic and Anglican bishops. Even more excitingly, a member of Refugees Call for Change, a refugee-led advocacy group facilitated by JRS UK, published an article on the ask in the Independent. We've continued to build on this success over the last month, as more and more organisations supporting refugees and people seeking asylum have been eager to get involved, and we supported organisations to write to their MPs on the issue. We've also been in contact with other policy-makers, submitting evidence to the government's inquiry into factors affecting the impact of COVID-19 on different groups, to highlight the significance of insecure immigration status. Watch this space!

Dr Sophie Cartwright, Policy Officer

How can you help? Visit www.jrsuk.net/statusforall and download a letter to send to your MP, asking the Prime Minister to grant status for those with insecure immigration status during the pandemic.

This is what it feels like to be a destitute asylum seeker in a pandemic

A member of our Refugees Call for Change group shared their experience as an asylum seeker for The Independent. Visit www.jrsuk.net/refugees-call-for-change to read the full article.

Just less than two months ago, life was still relatively tolerable for someone like me. I was still able to visit any one of the few day centres run by charities who provided hot meals for migrants, and they serve as our lifeline.

To be eligible to enjoy such privilege, an asylum seeker like me must show a recent "refusal letter" from the Home Office, which most of the charities that support us recognise as evidence of our destitution. Once I registered, the support would come by way of about two meals per week – often the only hot meals I would eat for an entire week. Most of us find ways to survive the rest of the time

dependent on unsold sandwiches donated by food shops such as Pret a Manger or Tesco.

People like me really cannot do much to improve our lives without immigration status – we are unable to take up employment, rent an accommodation or apply for any benefits, and we certainly cannot open a UK bank account. Even more damaging to our wellbeing is the fact that we belong to a rather unfortunate category of immigrants whose lack of status actually means we have "no recourse to public funds". This simply means we can only rely on charitable organisations for basic subsistence.

Living in a Time Out of Shape

If you are finding yourself more aware of time than ever at the moment, you are sharing something of the experience a group of refugee friends shared with Dr Anna Rowlands on the way the asylum system distorts time.

Time – and how we spend it – has suddenly become a major topic of social discussion. Recent media chat is full of interesting, earnest, sad, even humorous, exchanges about two themes in particular: what does it mean to spend time well? And what happens to us when those markers of time change suddenly, in a way that is beyond our control?

One of the reasons I am so interested in this new public awareness of time is that I have spent the last few years working on exactly this theme with a group of people who are experts-by-experience in the philosophies of time, but whose voices are rarely heard in public debate. These voices belong to refugees stranded in the most dysfunctional end of the UK asylum process. They know acutely what it is like to lose your everyday markers of time and have to reinvent them.

In a day centre in the East End of London the Jesuit Refugee Service works with, and is partly staffed by, a group of refugees who are living in destitution without the right to work, without public welfare support and with a constant risk of being detained in immigration detention facilities. During fieldwork I conducted over two years with the JRS community, time and its distortion became one of the main experiences that refugees reflected on.

Refugees talked about their sense that enforced idleness, the time it takes for appeals to be processed and the wasting of their skills and talents as they endure a lengthy waiting over years rather than months, creates a sense of 'degrading in time', creates a sense that you lack value and slowly erodes those very skills as they lie unused. We live, one interviewee told me, in a society that demands you contribute, but when you are not able to contribute that reduces a sense of self-worth and social value. It unsettles and uproots people in deep and lasting psychological ways.

As is well documented, for those who have been detained the stress of counting their days up against an unknown limit, creates acute mental stress. Not knowing when this will end makes the experience far tougher. We know that those detained fear both stasis, that nothing will change and that they will remain in this place of suffering, and yet they also fear at the same time sudden and catastrophic change. This is a terrible double

mental bind that many fail to understand as the long term legacy of detention.

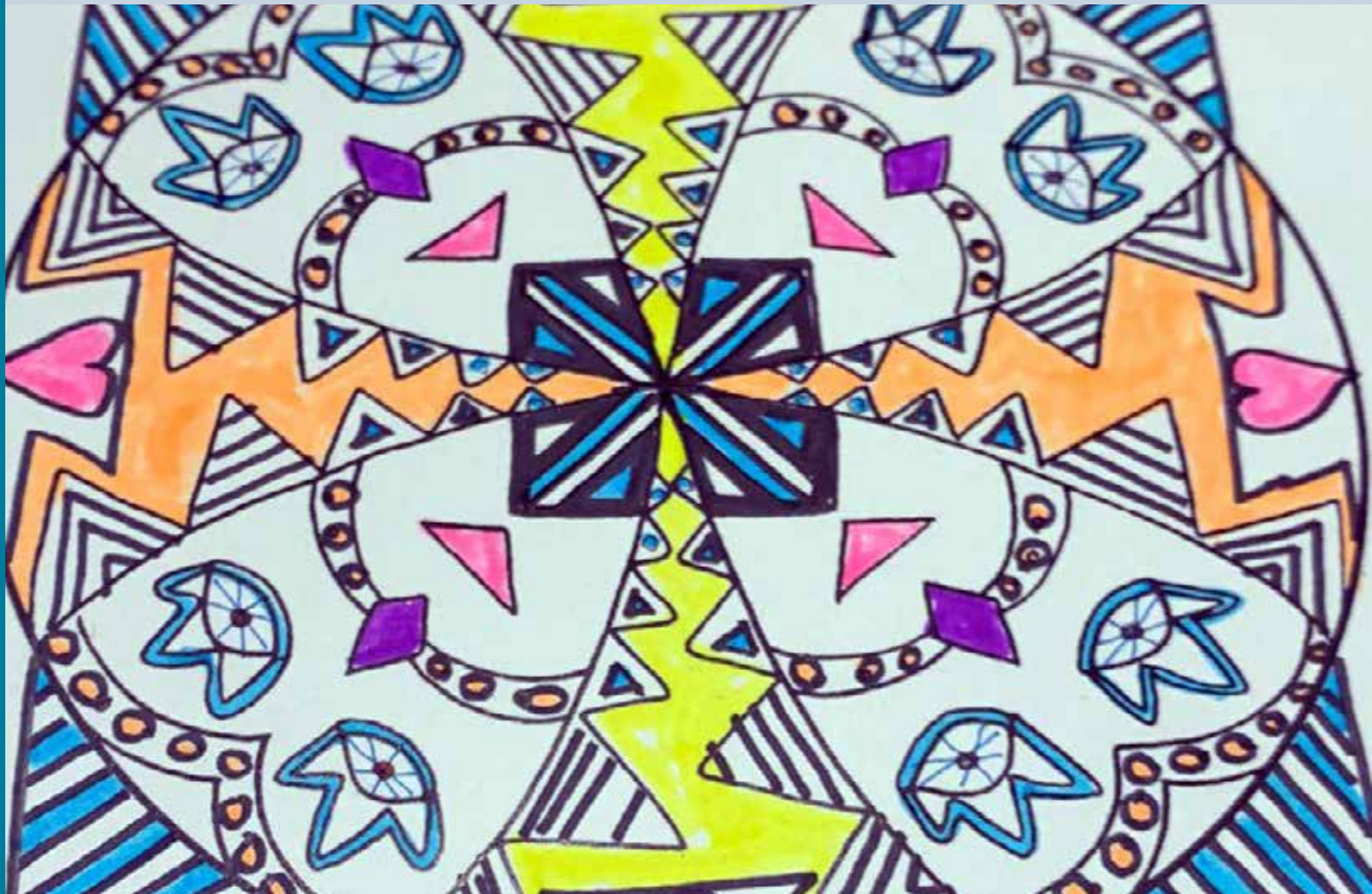
Yet, those I interviewed were clear that they, like we are now, find ways to resist the flattening and deadening of time. This is crucial to survival and wellbeing. 'Being able to spend your time well really matters', I was told. Spending time well means creating spaces that overcome isolation and where experience can be shared, and stories told. Interviewees told me that they had valued being able to volunteer to help others in need, to learn new skills and keep alive the ones they have. Crucial was the ability to feel that they had expertise that could help others on the same road. It will surprise no one who has survived the asylum system that so many people have volunteered so quickly in this crisis.

My hope is that the current situation and our own relative shrinking of freedom, often but not always with forms of privilege still attached, will give us a small insight into both the harm that such restrictions cause, even in the most resilient of people and situations, and would make us cautious in the extreme to now ever knowingly inflict such powers on others without extreme cause.

And we might possibly look with new admiration at those who find ways to survive such pain and use it as the basis for a life lived well for themselves, with and for others. This is the risk and the task of all human living and loving, and we find wisdom on this theme in the most hidden and difficult of places.

We might also remember that it is precisely these communities, already wise in the challenges of negotiated disordered time, who face some of the greatest challenges in shielding themselves from this virus. Here the option to socially distance, that creates such strain for many of us, remains a social privilege that even though challenging, many cannot take for granted.

Dr Anna Rowlands is St Hilda Associate Professor in Catholic Social Thought and Practice at the University of Durham. Dr Rowlands spent two years collaborating with JRS UK on a report 'For Our Welfare and Not for our Harm'. This blog was written for JRS UK and originally published on ThinkingFaith.org.



One of the artworks made during the lockdown by a refugee friend in the Creative Arts group.

The Jesuit Refugee Service works in more than 50 countries around the world.

JRS UK is made up of staff and many volunteers who work to accompany, serve and advocate for destitute refugees in the UK, of all faiths and none.

If you can, please consider donating to JRS UK. With your support JRS UK can continue to accompany destitute and detained refugees in a spirit of hospitality, welcome and love.

Donate today

Call 020 7488 7321

Email uk@jrs.net
Visit www.jrsuk.net/donate

Mail your cheque/postal order made payable to Jesuit Refugee Service to the address on the right.



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