



Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK AUTUMN 2020

accompany • serve • advocate

“Imagine a world where your nationality won’t matter as much as your humanity does.”

— Daniel, a JRS refugee friend —



Policy Update

This has been a really busy few months for policy and advocacy. At the end of June, we released a major new report, *Detained and Dehumanised: the impact of immigration detention*. It was based on interviews conducted in our day centre and gave voice to the gruelling experiences of people who had been detained in different immigration removal centres across the UK over the last 20 years.

The report demonstrates that the impact on those detained is deep and long-lasting, and that long detention, and not knowing when you will be released, is particularly traumatic. In the report we recommend an end to immigration detention.

Refugees' words from this report were quoted in a parliamentary debate about amendments to put a time limit on immigration detention; currently, the UK is the only country in Europe

without a time limit on detention. Very sadly, the amendments did not succeed, but we will continue to challenge the practice of detention. If you would like to read the report in full or in summary, please do visit our website www.jrsuk.net/detentionreport

At the same time, as lockdown eases and refugee friends temporarily accommodated in hotels are faced with the streets, we have been advocating for the government to ensure that everyone, irrespective of immigration status, can access accommodation and support, and continuing to call for status for all.

Sophie

Dr Sophie Cartwright, Policy Officer

To follow our advocacy work visit www.jrsuk.net/advocate and find out how you can get involved!

Make a New Life Possible

Have you considered leaving a gift in your Will? After providing for family and loved ones, leaving a gift for the Jesuit Refugee Service UK in your Will is one way you can help make a new life for a destitute refugee.

Bernard Elliot SJ started JRS in the UK to support detained and destitute refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, responding to their practical and emotional needs with friendship, generosity and kindness.

The legacy he left is one that you are now an important part of. Your support for JRS UK allows our refugee friends to feel accompanied and understood in some of their most difficult moments. Without your support they are left feeling isolated and uncertain whilst navigating a hostile asylum system.

Today, our mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees is needed more than ever, and you too can leave a legacy. You can read in this quarterly update about the lives that are impacted by the generous support you give.

Get in touch with Jessica if you would like more information about leaving a gift in your Will to JRS UK, after providing for your family and loved ones.



Fr Mike SJ accompanies friends at the day centre thanks to support from people like you.



020 7488 7321



uk@jrs.net



UNITED
KINGDOM

Message from the Director



I wish the easing of the lockdown in the UK indicated an end in sight to the physical separation from our refugee friends. However, it is still not safe to run our busy day centre, and our services remain remote or on-the-road. Over the summer months we have been piloting picnics in locations around London to gather refugee friends together, which feels like a step towards returning to some form of normal. But there is nothing normal about this 'new normal', as we trust, and pray, that there is an end to this pandemic and restored safety for everyone.

Unfortunately, while the end of lockdown brings hope, it has also propelled a homelessness crisis for our refugee friends who find themselves asked to leave temporary accommodation provided by Local Authorities. You will hear from our At Home coordinator, Naomi, who is tirelessly looking to ensure that no friend finds themselves without a place to stay, either through referrals to other charities or as we begin to reopen our own hosting scheme *At Home* and new accommodation project, Emilie House.

You'll notice I have included a survey in this quarterly update. As we plan for 2021 we want to ensure that you, the supporters who encourage and enable JRS to accompany our refugee friends, are heard. After all, you make up an integral part of the JRS community. We're a close knit group and we would like to make sure we know you, and why you too feel committed to standing in solidarity with refugees. I would really appreciate if you could take 10 minutes to fill and return the survey with the envelope provided. Your thoughts matter to us.

I hope you enjoy reading this update. I, along with the team, am excited to share the projects and impact that you make possible. Thank you.

With grateful thanks,

Sarah Teather, Director



While the day centre remains closed for face to face services, essential items are being packed and delivered from the centre thanks to staff and volunteers.

Emilie House

Safe accommodation is the most pressing need for most of our refugee friends. Without government support nor the right to work, they cannot afford to rent a place to live.

The Sisters of the Holy Family were founded in 1816 by Saint Emilie de Rodat in France, who at a young age realised her vocation to serve God by helping those in need. Being drawn in particular to the poor, she began her ministry by teaching young children, whose mothers were unable to provide them with an education. As her work branched out to include those facing many forms of physical struggle, Emilie, along with three companions, founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Saint Emilie.

Emilie desired that her Congregation would always be ready to go out and respond to those who are most in need. Serving the needs of the poor with compassion, love and tenderness has been the spirit of the Sisters of the Holy Family who continue St Emilie's mission. This same spirit is how, more than 200 years later, St Emilie's congregation of Sisters in London came to learn about the needs of destitute refugees through JRS UK.

Living destitute at the hands of a harsh asylum system, hundreds of friends are left with no choice but to live in the home of a friend or on the street.

To this end JRS UK started the At Home hosting scheme in 2012. Sisters of Holy Family (St Emilie) were regular, generous hosts for our At Home scheme, over time hosting six refugees, one at a time, in their home.

In 2019, the Sisters of The Holy Family of St Emilie, who have become dedicated supporters of JRS UK, have offered a house, rent free, to host destitute female refugees who find themselves homeless. Just like their foundress, the Sisters have shown a Christ-like mercy and compassion to women who face the trauma of living on the street.

In addition to the donation of the house, the Sisters have donated a grant to cover ten years' worth of running costs. The house will be managed by JRS UK and offer refugee women safety and comfort from a life on the street.



The beautiful house the Sisters of Holy Family (Saint Emilie) have generously gifted JRS UK to offer safe accommodation for female asylum seekers.

The house is situated in South London and has 10 ensuite bedrooms. With thanks to Sisters of The Holy Family (St Emilie) and other generous donors supporting capital renovations, Emilie House is hoped to be up and running in the Autumn, ready to receive it's first guests. The house has been named 'Emilie House', in honour of St Emilie's legacy which has made this possible. Along with our 'At Home' scheme, *Emilie House* will be used to meet the urgent needs of our friends for shelter and safety.

JRS UK are extremely grateful to the Sisters for such a generous gift, and needless to say so are our refugee friends!

"As Sisters of the Holy Family we are delighted to think that our former formation house will be used for such a necessary and worthwhile venture and one that is so much in line with the spirit of our foundress Saint Emilie"

- Sister Irena, Provincial of Sisters of the Holy Family (St Emilie)



Homelessness Crisis

JRS UK's hosting scheme, *At Home*, has been a lifeline for many of our refugee friends who face homelessness in London. More than 100 short-term placements have been made, however new placements were impossible during the period of lockdown, to ensure the safety and health of our volunteer hosts and refugee friends alike. Naomi shares fears of a homelessness crisis as the lockdown slowly eases in the UK.

One of our refugee friends, Emmanuel*, was sleeping rough outside a tube station in North London before he was accommodated by the local authority through the 'Everyone In' initiative. This initiative began in April when social distancing measures and the threat of the coronavirus halted the ability for the homeless to find food and other help through face-to-face interactions with friends or charities.

Before Emmanuel was housed by Local Authorities, he was very distressed whenever we would speak on the phone – sometimes brought to tears when speaking about his situation. He was scared of the coronavirus. When I spoke to him after he had been accommodated in a hotel for a few days, and after some decent sleep, he had so much more life in his voice.

'Hello Naomi!', he greeted me cheerily, rather than the despondence and desperation in his voice before.

However, we have heard from various sources that this essential provision to prevent widespread homelessness may soon be ending. Throughout the lockdown, government ministers stated several times that rules restricting access to public funds for people without immigration status, like our refugee friends, will remain in place. Meaning that once Local Authorities inevitably end their accommodation, our friends will have no choice but to return to the street.

I spoke to another of our refugee friends, Samuel*, who has heard rumours about needing to leave his accommodation soon, and doesn't know what to do.

'I can't sleep', he said to me on the phone. The possibility of having nowhere to sleep in a matter of weeks is causing a great deal of anxiety for many of our refugee friends.

For so many, the 'Everyone In' initiative has meant access to some basic necessities like a bed, food and washing facilities during the pandemic; necessities that some of our refugee friends haven't had for a long time.

As lockdown eases and councils are told to look beyond the coronavirus emergency, accommodation provision is expected to end, leaving those with insecure immigration status, including our friends, particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

At JRS we are very concerned that our friends will imminently be on the streets again. Without action from the government to give refugees access to public funds and the labour market, our friends are left to rely on the generosity of friends, strangers and charities. A difficult task when the streets are empty and drop-in services still suspended.

While new placements have not been made since March as the UK retreated into lockdown, JRS are now slowly reopening our hosting scheme to refugees who need somewhere to stay. Plans will be in place to make hosting as safe as possible for volunteer hosts and guests in this time. Hosts regularly share the benefits from their experience- including the joy in seeing their refugee guests grow as they settle into the home.

If you live in London and could consider becoming a JRS host, offering a three-month stay to a destitute refugee, please do get in touch with me via email or phone to have a chat about the scheme:

📞 07395 486201 ✉️ naomi.turner@jrs.net
jrsuk.net/at-home-hosting-scheme

*Names changed to protect anonymity

**If you are not in position to offer a spare room at this time, but would like to support our work for our homeless refugee friends, perhaps you will consider becoming a Friend of JRS by committing a monthly donation.
www.jrsuk.net/friends or call 020 7488 7321**

World Day of Migrants & Refugees



On Sunday 27th September, Pope Francis will mark the 106th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Each year the Holy Father selects a different theme for us to reflect upon, 'Like Jesus Christ, forced to flee' has been chosen for this year's theme. Nick Hanrahan shares how the message chimes with the experience of our refugee friends.

In his message for the day, Pope Francis invites us to reflect on the fact that Jesus himself faced the uncertainty and tragedy of being forced to flee that we see so many experience in the world today. We are reminded that through His flight to Egypt, God has united himself in a unique way to refugees and forcibly displaced people. Pope Francis encourages us to realise that *'In each of these people, forced to flee to safety, Jesus is present as he was at the time of Herod. In the faces*

of the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, strangers and prisoners, we are called to see the face of Christ who pleads with us to help.'

If we recognise this, we see in a very special way that *'forcibly displaced people offer us this opportunity to meet the Lord'*. Helping us respond to this opportunity, Pope Francis offers six sets of verbs, each giving practical actions. Upon reading them I saw many things speak true to the mission of JRS as

well as shine light on how we improve and grow the way we accompany our refugee friends.

Firstly, **'to know in order to understand'**. Pope Francis encourages encounter as a way to see beyond statistics and headlines, focusing instead on the individuals involved. At JRS, we make a great effort to know each of our refugee friends by name and to learn about what defines them as a person, beyond their immigration status. Knowing

what makes them who they are, and allowing them to know the same about us, helps JRS to create a relationship of mutual understanding.

Second, **'to be close in order to serve'**. The Holy Father offers the example from the story of the Good Samaritan, of one who got close when others walked away. This has been a real challenge during a time of social distancing but between drivers delivering food parcels and our others offering their time to provide practical and emotional support over the phone, volunteers have generously remained close to our friends, serving them as best they can during tough times.

Thirdly, **'to be reconciled, we need to listen'**. In a world of constant noise and instant messaging all of us can find it difficult to listen. Pope Francis asks that as lockdown saw our streets quieten down, we too need to do something to still ourselves and hear what marginalised people have to say. In June, our Policy Officer released 'Detained and Dehumanised', a report which listened to the stories of those who have spent time in immigration detention in the UK and have rarely had their voices heard. We hope that in sharing their stories, we can truly listen to what refugees have been forced to endure, and we can all be a part of the reconciliation needed as a result of a hostile immigration system.

'In order to grow, it is necessary to share'. Pope Francis reminds us that sharing was an 'essential element' of the first Christian community and that the importance of sharing has been shown clearly throughout this pandemic as people

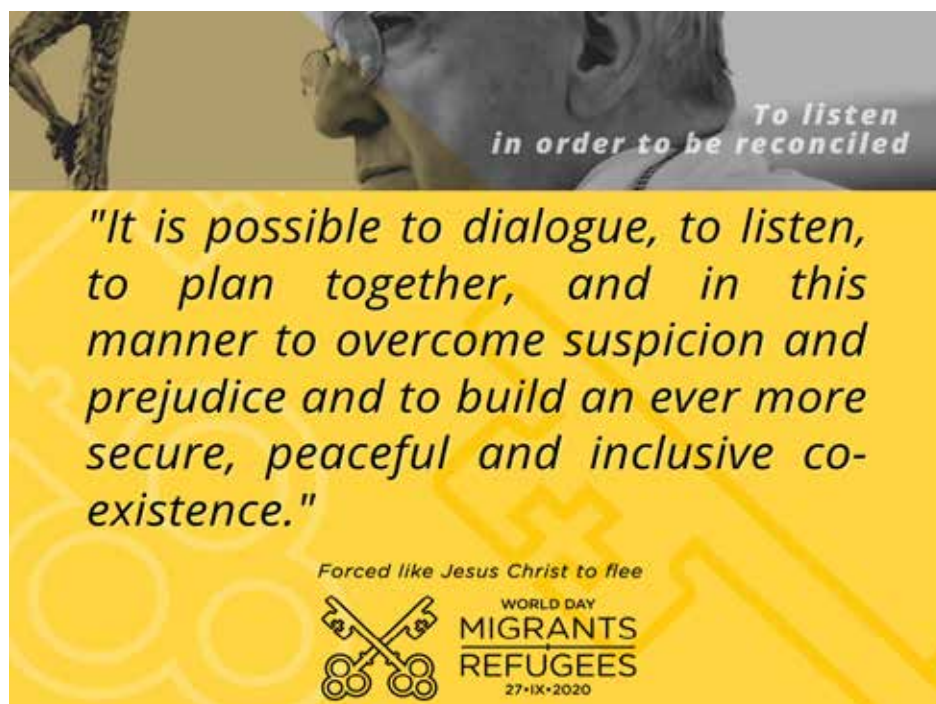
respond to each other's needs. No clearer sign of this can be found than the immense generosity of our supporters who have volunteered, donated and prayed for our refugee friends during this time of trial for everyone. We are so grateful for each of you and would not have been able to do it without you.

Next, the Holy Father says **'We need to be involved in order to promote'**. Here he warns us not to allow a well-meaning desire to help or serve prevent us from seeing the value and agency people have to offer. This reminds me of one of our refugee friends who in normal times would be volunteering as a chef at another refugee day centre, using her wonderful cooking skills which she often demonstrates at our weekly Community Kitchen sessions. During lockdown, she used some of the food she has received in her food parcel from JRS to cook for others she knows are in need in her local area. Our refugee friends are incredibly talented, generous and offer us so much.

Finally, Pope Francis calls us **'to cooperate in order to build'**. Throughout the pandemic cooperation has become even more vital than ever. It has been a great joy for us at JRS to work more closely with other charities, businesses and churches to adapt to drastic changes and continue supporting our friends. Offers of help, referrals and funding have found new relationships, and strengthened others, all in the pursuit of easing challenges faced by refugees during a particularly difficult past six months.

In his message, Pope Francis not only offers practical advice for you and I to remember as we accompany our refugee friends, but reminds us that Jesus Christ united Himself so closely to those forced to flee their homes while on Earth. For some this brings strength and comfort to realise that we meet Jesus when we meet with our refugee friends.

You can read the Pope's full message for World Day of Migrants & Refugees by visiting: jrsuk.net/praying-with-refugees



Looking for Light at the end of the Tunnel

Basirat is from Nigeria and first came to the UK in 2012 with her two children, who are now aged 17 and 20. She's been supported by JRS for over four years, and always has a smile to share with you. Below is an interview between Basirat and Megan, JRS Communications and Development Manager, about her needs and experiences during lockdown

What's been the priority for you in keeping your family safe?

"Getting food is priority number one for me. I'm getting food from JRS, and most of my friends they get food from JRS too. They give me enough food for the family. And toiletries too: shaving powder, deodorant, face masks, food, biscuits - I can't mention it all. Many things I can't buy for myself, I know they bring it for me.

"From the beginning of the lockdown JRS has been there, they never left, not for a second.

"Doing our daily activities like going to charities where we meet friends -we'd talk we meet we laugh, do so many things. We can't go there again. It's very very difficult."

What's it like to visit the Home Office?

"It's like going to the lion's den. You want to go inside the lion's den you have to get prepared. When you go there you don't know if I'm going to come out, get sent back to your country, or be put into detention. When it's getting to a week before I have to go to the Home Office, I am always sick. I have high blood pressure; my blood pressure will start rising when it's getting nearer to go. Which I know myself I am always very sick. Sometimes the reporting, the people working there, the staff, they are not friendly. They talk to you anyhow. They believe you are nothing. "What are you doing in this country, go back to your country" they say. They use the "f" word sometimes. Many things happen in the Home Office that some people don't know."



Aidan and Basirat on the London Legal walk 2019.

It must be so hard and we can only imagine what that experience must be like. How do you keep on going to get through this difficult time?

"There is light after the tunnel" – that's my proverb. You are in the dark, we don't know what we have, we are just like a blind person. We are walking, struggling trying to get our papers. The Home Office they refuse you, put in a fresh claim they refuse you, put you in detention, threatening to take you back home, there are many in the hospital, no access to housing, many things. But at the end of the day if you keep on struggling, fighting, doing things, you know, you see the light. So now I'm in the dark, I'm in the tunnel. I can't access anything, I can't go anywhere, I can't see the light. But after I get my papers, I think things will change. The light is the papers that will make me have access to everything."

I know that you like to volunteer at charities like JRS and share your cooking skills. What is it about cooking that you enjoy?

"Cooking is my hobby. I love cooking. Even since I was a teenager, very young. Cooking back home is different to the way I cook here. I have to learn the food I cook here because I'm dealing with different people. Where I volunteer we have about 70 people that I cook for every week. I love cooking, it makes me so proud, makes me so happy. It gives me joy!"

While Basirat and many others like her wait for their refugee status in the UK, a donation today can help them find practical, legal and emotional support at JRS. Your support can also help us to stand alongside our refugee friends, advocating for their voices to be heard and their right to claim asylum.

Life in Lockdown



As the Detention Outreach team continues its effort to accompany refugees who are still detained in Immigration Removal Centres (IRC), and those who have been released, a stark reality is shared by one of our refugee friends with Detention Outreach Officer Will.

Many of us find conversation in asking one another about life in lockdown, caught up in the feelings of restriction as we were bound to our homes. But for a refugee friend supported in the post-detention support group, the UK lockdown brought up feelings felt much earlier than the start of the pandemic.

“I have always been in lockdown,” he told Will. Without the right to work or rent, the freedom to provide for yourself, or choose how you would like to spend your time has been taken away from many destitute and detained refugees.



To realise that refugees, who are detained under the pretence of being deported, are really held in lockdown for an indefinite amount of time is a concerning realisation. Perhaps our experience of lockdown will not only help us empathise with the experiences of refugees who are detained or living destitute, but fuel a persistent call for change until indefinite detention is abolished.

Concerns around how best to stay safe, worry about our families and those we live with are shared by refugees who are released from detention. However, they do not have the same stability that many of us do. Reliant on the good will of others for accommodation, with no way to sustain themselves or contribute to those who accommodate them as they cannot earn an income, makes our friends feel robbed of opportunity and freedom -much like how many of us felt in lockdown.

The post-detention support group meets virtually whilst physical gatherings are still being discouraged. Regular catch ups and a chance to speak their mind or express feelings has been taken up by some friends who have experienced time in detention. Meanwhile, those who remain detained in IRCs near Heathrow are feeling the weight of an unending sentence.

At the two Heathrow IRCs, there are still 140 detainees, with hundreds having been released since the start of the lockdown. Releasing people from detention aimed to reduce the risk of infections in the heavily populated centres, and those who remain feel the space they have left. If there was any comfort to be found in detention, it was the comradery with fellow detainees that helped to pass the time.

While social visits from charities have been banned during the lockdown, this is slowly being lifted. In the meantime, in an effort to assure refugees that they have not been forgotten, Will is organising for 200 message-filled cards to be delivered to them with words of encouragement, friendship and hope.

“With the centres being closed to visits and individuals relying on their phones to keep in contact with people outside of detention, I can only imagine that feelings of isolation and of being forgotten can only have increased. Therefore, as an outreach team we have decided to write small messages of solidarity to those who are still in detention. I hope that these messages may be a reminder that there are people outside of detention who know what is going on.”

- Will, Detention Outreach Officer

Social Activities at a Distance

Refugee Activities Coordinator, Dallya, shares the lively schedule of virtual gatherings with refugee friends, and plans for upcoming activities to ensure there are still a variety of ways for our friends to express feelings and experiences with the JRS community.

Refugee activities, ordinarily taking place at the JRS day centre, formed a schedule of lively activities for our friends to participate in. Our friends could acquire new skills, or share their talents, all the while finding therapeutic and social opportunities to feel relief from their day to day challenges from living destitute in London.

As the lockdown began early this year, Dallya quickly moved as many of the regular activities as possible into the virtual world.

“Switching our activities from physical interactions to virtual activities was difficult yet worthwhile.

Continuing and introducing new activities played a huge role in our refugee friends’ week during the lockdown, as it helped them to find different platforms to express their feelings, share their experiences, stories and have access to helpful services.”

For many friends, lockdown meant staying in a small hotel room or flat, with little access to entertainment, and a sense of uncertainty fell on many of our friends, explains Dallya:

“At the beginning of this pandemic, some of our refugee friends were not motivated to join our activities as there was low morale and a sense of lost hope amongst the group.”

While many of us may have had the preoccupation of working from home to pass the hours, our friends cannot work. Virtual activities provide some sense of structure to their week, and importantly, in a meaningful way. First the prayer groups were set up, for those who find



“ I am always interested in different understandings of language, and if English is your second or even third language then there will be some really original ways of phrasing your thoughts inspired by the other languages you live in. I have worked on poetry projects and performances with numerous refugee and migrant writers, it is so important that we make space for the sometimes hidden experiences, and we all have so much to learn from people who have lived between different cultures. ”

comfort in their faith, to pray for each other and of course for the affects of the pandemic.

“Once they started to receive ongoing support in other areas from JRS such as emotional, financial and spiritual help, they became more interested to re-join the activities and take part.

I think this proved that even under these unusual circumstances both our friends and JRS team were keen to keep on moving forward and continuously support each other.”

Activities such as creative arts and community kitchen were next to continue, although now it is an opportunity to share what they were working on via a video call. Recipes are shared and photos of their cooking adventures are presented.

Last month Dallya introduced a new activity to the list of weekly virtual sessions for our refugee friends– an open writing space.

“The new JRS Open Writing Space was created so that our refugee friends could feel free to write and share their thoughts on any topic they liked. We didn’t want the English language to feel like a barrier for our friends,

and we wanted them to realise that you can share, through writing, in any form that feels most comfortable.

The aim is to express yourself freely and share it among our friends on our WhatsApp group and weekly Zoom meetings held every Thursday at 2pm.

We have Laila Sumpton, a Poet, who leads the session and shares her teaching experiences with us for eight weeks.”

Some friends are already looking forward to future sessions, and there is a lot of literary talent to be seen from our group of refugee friends!

Dallya is keeping busy to ensure an array of activities are available to our friends, with the aim of serving our friends and all their personalities and interests.

“We have an idea to introduce online Music Therapy sessions, like the sessions we used to host at our day centre. Another project is the befriending program with Age UK, which may start soon, where our refugee friends can chat with elderly people from Age UK, forming mutual friendships and company during a time when many of them may feel lonely.”

Another year until the London Marathon



JRS staff and volunteers cheer on runners at the 2019 London Marathon

The 2020 London Marathon has been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic, leaving our runners relieved but in anticipation as they revise their training plans to prepare for the new race date.

JRS UK participates in the London Marathon each year, with running places available for avid runners who are willing to train and fundraise for JRS UK. Understandably this year, the big event that attracts thousands of runners, spectators, staff and volunteers is threatened by a virus that thrives in crowds. After months of waiting for an official decision, it has been announced by Virgin Money London Marathon that the iconic race will be postponed and take place instead on 4th October 2021.

The six runners who are currently training for the marathon, and simultaneously fundraising for JRS UK, are relieved to hear the race has been delayed. Training for a marathon is a deliberate process,

and the uncertainty around its date took its toll on their preparations. Most of them are glad to hear that there is another 12 months to prepare for the marathon, to fundraise to support destitute refugees, and for the world to recover from a global pandemic.

We would like to thank our runners for their resilience and commitment to taking on the London Marathon despite the setbacks this year. It is so encouraging to hear that they are happy that the funds they have raised so far are already being put to good use to help refugees during the ongoing health crisis. We appreciate their support and look forward to cheering them on in October 2021!

The changes to the London Marathon means that JRS UK will be able to have a further five runners participate and represent JRS UK in 2021, with more details available in the coming months.

Read how our runners have been preparing by visiting their blogs on our website www.jrsuk.net/blog



Artwork contributed by a refugee friend participating in the JRS 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.



UNITED
KINGDOM

Telephone: 020 7488 7321
Fax: 020 7488 7329
E-mail: uk@jrs.net
web: www.jrsuk.net

[f /jesuitrefugeeserviceuk](https://www.facebook.com/jesuitrefugeeserviceuk)
[@JRSUK](https://twitter.com/JRSUK)
[@jrsuk_](https://www.instagram.com/jrsuk_)

Jesuit Refugee Service UK
Hurtado Jesuit Centre
2 Chandler Street
London
E1W 2QT