



# Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK AUTUMN 2021

**accompany • serve • advocate**

**“We are called to dream together, fearlessly, as a single human family, as companions on the same journey, as sons and daughters of the same earth that is our common home, sisters and brothers all.”**

— Pope Francis —

# Towards an ever wider “we”

## 107<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September

On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September the Catholic church marks the 107<sup>th</sup> Day of Migrants and Refugees and Pope Francis has chosen the theme: *Towards an ever wider “we”*.

In his message for the day, Pope Francis appeals to us to build a universal “we” — to journey together for the sake of renewing the human family, building together a future of justice and peace, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

In order to ensure the proper care of our common home, the Holy Father calls on us to come together to create communion within diversity. We must become a “we” that is ever wider and more co-responsible, in the profound conviction that whatever good is done in our world is done for present and future generations. Ours must be a personal and collective commitment that cares for all our sisters and brothers, in particular those who continue to live on the existential peripheries: asylum seekers, refugees, and forced migrants.

### A Prayer for World Day of Migrants and Refugees

Holy, beloved Father,  
your Son Jesus taught us  
that there is great rejoicing in heaven  
whenever someone lost is found,  
whenever someone excluded, rejected or  
discarded is gathered into our “we”,  
which thus becomes ever wider.

We ask you to grant the followers of Jesus,  
and all people of good will,  
the grace to do your will on earth.

Bless each act of welcome and outreach  
that draws those in exile  
into the “we” of community and of the Church,  
so that our earth may truly become  
what you yourself created it to be:  
the common home of all our brothers and  
sisters.

Amen.

Join JRS as we join with the Holy Father in prayer on Sunday 26th. You may like to use this prayer from the Pope’s message, or you can find more resources for praying with refugees on JRS UK website: [www.jrsuk.net/praying-with-refugees/](http://www.jrsuk.net/praying-with-refugees/)

## Save the Date:

**JRS UK  
Advent Service 2021**

**Tuesday 7th December, 7pm**

**Farm Street Church & Live Streamed online**





# Message from the Director



**The events in Afghanistan continue to shake us all: we watched together with horror the scenes unfolding at Kabul airport, and were starkly reminded that in an emergency, refugees have little freedom on how they travel to safety or where they go; that their journey to flee will be fraught with danger, but flee they must. As Afghanistan gradually fades from rolling headline news, we stand in solidarity with those who didn't manage to access an evacuation flight; we stand with those who had the difficult choice whether to stay and hide or try to flee over land and sea.**

As we mark and celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees this month, Pope Francis calls us to "dream together" and move together towards an ever wider 'we'. The act of dreaming about the Kingdom of God is inherently collective. We cannot do it alone. Our dreaming together transcends national and cultural boundaries, and involves those on the margins both in terms of what is dreamed – we see beyond our own borders – and in terms of the 'we' that is doing the dreaming – the whole human family, ultimately, dreams together. The act of dreaming together is an affirmation of our kinship. This is a striking message in a global political context where, so often, we are encouraged to pit 'our' good against the good of others, of those deemed outsiders, and where refugees and other vulnerable migrants are routinely dehumanised, subjected to cruelty, and excluded.

It has been deeply heartening and moving to witness and experience the enormous outpouring of welcome and generosity to people seeking sanctuary these past two months – be this in the small actions in local communities and the incredible collections of items to donate, or the countless conversations the JRS team have had with people like you wanting to know how you can help. It gives me some hope that we can "dream together" and, together, build an ever wider 'we'.

The JRS team have been busy planning and preparing resources to support our advocacy work to stand Together with Refugees and to fight the cruel and inhumane changes to the asylum system the government are putting forward with the Nationality and Borders Bill. We've collated all the resources we have (so far!) on the JRS UK website, and inside this issue of Together you can read more about the top 7 concerns we have with the Bill, and three actions you can take today to call on the government to reflect the welcoming and hospitable society we are in our legislation.

There is much more to read inside: you'll hear from Juliet about how such a simple thing as having access to a contactless payment card makes a huge difference to her day-to-day life; Hannah reflects on co-ordinating a hosting scheme virtually and our urgent need for hosts; and volunteer Mark reflects on returning to in-person visiting at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Together and it gives you a glimpse of our work accompanying refugee friends. I am forever grateful to the support and generosity of our supporters who make all of our work possible. Thank you.

With grateful thanks & prayers,

Sarah Teather, Director

p.s. we are in urgent need of volunteer hosts, particularly for hosting men in Greater London. If you have a spare room in London and would be open to hosting – please get in touch: [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net).



# One for the family album



Refugee friends and the JRS team gather together in anticipation of exploring Kew Gardens.



Enjoying a picnic lunch together.

**At the end of August JRS refugee friends, volunteers and staff visited the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in South West London. JRS is grateful to the support of the Kew Gardens Community Access Scheme for enabling this incredible trip to take place.**

Dallya's message for refugee friends: *"Thanks for being there and giving us the chance to see you and feel our family back again. I enjoyed every moment with you! For the little ones, thanks for the greatest, pure moments we had with you all!"*

Refugee friend: *"A million thanks to you all at JRS for organising such a lovely outing. Thanks also to the volunteers for the ice cream. I really enjoyed it!"*

Refugee friend: *"Tired but happy! Thank you for a great day. It was good to visit Kew Gardens in a very friendly group."*

Refugee friend: *"Thank you Dallya, the awesome volunteer teams, the fantastic participating friends and family of the JRS network; for making the Kew Gardens day out tour a fabulous and memorable event! We all certainly enjoyed ourselves the whole time without a doubt! Hopefully there will be more of this type of events in the coming future! Thank you so much once again it was a blast!"*



What a joy to be walking and exploring together after such a long time!



A fun family-filled day!



# 7 things about the Nationality and Borders Bill (and 3 steps you can take to change it)

The Nationality and Borders Bill – aka the #Anti-Refugee Bill – seeks to overhaul the UK asylum system. Far from creating a ‘fair but firm’ asylum system, the cruel and inhumane proposals would deny many refugees the chance to seek sanctuary in the UK, criminalise many of those who try, isolate refugees in harmful out-of-town reception centres, and undermine 70 years of international co-operation under the UN refugee convention.

## Here's our top 7 concerns about the Bill:

1. How worthy of protection someone is will depend on how they travelled to the UK: denying sanctuary to the vast majority of people seeking asylum
2. It will expand the use of detention-like accommodation centres: like Napier and Penally Barracks
3. It will permit the use of offshore processing of cases
4. It will tear families apart, making family reunion near-impossible
5. It places huge barriers to protection within the asylum determination process
6. No proposals for safe routes for refugees, and fails to provide a strong commitment to help refugees resettlement
7. People seeking sanctuary will be more vulnerable to trafficking and modern slavery

## 3 ways to advocate today (and 1 more coming soon!):

1. **Display** an orange heart in your car, in your window, on your church bulletin board to show that you stand #togetherwithrefugees. Download or order a pre-printed one at [www.jrsuk.net/together-with-refugees](http://www.jrsuk.net/together-with-refugees)
2. **Write to your MP** to raise your concerns – there's plenty of resources to help you already on the JRS UK website – [www.jrsuk.net/together-with-refugees](http://www.jrsuk.net/together-with-refugees)
3. **Pray** for refugee friends and parliamentarians making life-altering decisions. We have a host of prayer resources to help: [www.jrsuk.net/praying-with-refugees](http://www.jrsuk.net/praying-with-refugees)

**1 more coming soon:** JRS UK have been working with the SVP to put together a digital resource to help individuals and parish communities to challenge and advocate against the Bill; as the way we treat refugees reflects who we are. We'll be launching these resources at an online event on 20th October – register to attend at [www.jrsuk.net/together-with-refugees](http://www.jrsuk.net/together-with-refugees)

*“The best way to achieve justice is to expose injustice. Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.”*

Mohammed – member of JRS UK's advocacy group, Refugees Call for Change

# The great equaliser



*A stack of brand-new Equals Cards ready to be distributed to refugee friends.*

JRS introduced a pre-paid MasterCard during the pandemic as a way for refugee friends to have access to the hardship fund and to be able to pay for items safely; as shops stopped taking cash. It was a huge adjustment for refugee friends. Asylum seekers aren't allowed a bank account, so many refugee friends had never had a bank card since being in the UK and never used contactless payment before.

Joanna caught up with refugee friend Juliet (not her real name), to understand the impact of the pre-paid Equals card and how the JRS hardship fund is needed more now than ever.

## What was it like when COVID first began?

*"Everything changed – we couldn't access going to JRS like we used to go face to face – we couldn't see our friends the way we used to see them in JRS, we couldn't eat together the way we used to eat together in the lunchtime, we couldn't see any of our friends and things just changed suddenly.*

*"We couldn't do any activity, like we used to do, those activities used to help us to keep going. It was really challenging and difficult, but we started to learn about the Zoom and starting slowly, slowly started to meet on the Zoom which wasn't also easy for everyone, because we never used Zoom before, but we had to ... it was the only way to communicate so that we started slowly slowly to get used to it.*

*"It was the challenge we were all facing!"*

## How was it when you first got the Equals card?

*"The Equals card, the difference that it made, it gave me dignity actually, so I don't have to worry about paying cash. In the beginning it wasn't easy, because we had to understand what the Equals card is, how it works, and how to use it.*





*"I learnt how to use it in a safe way: for example, not showing anyone my pin code. The JRS team were always on the end of the phone – or Zoom – to help if I needed it."*

### Did it take some getting used to having a contactless card?

*"It was a big change, a good change, it's like giving my dignity back, is what I can say about that."*

*"It is very good to have the Equals card, as we couldn't buy anything with cash – only card. We could do our shopping in the safe way, otherwise we couldn't buy anything. We couldn't do any shopping, so the Equals card came at the right moment!"*

### What difference has having the Equals card made?

*"I only see positive differences: I can use it safely, I can use it as a sort-of bank account helping me to budget: I don't have to start counting money when I do shopping anymore. It gives me dignity and I can shop online – which I've never been able to do before!"*

*"Thank you!"*

## Meet the Team: Miriam Casework and Support Manager



A passion for social justice led trained barrister Miriam to focus her expertise to fight for the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of modern slavery. Having developed her knowledge in roles with the British Red Cross and The Salvation Army, Miriam leads the dynamic four-person team at JRS providing refugee friends with casework support; fostering a supportive context of accompaniment, Miriam and the team work hard to support refugee friends as they navigate a hostile asylum system.

## The JRS refugee hardship fund

The hardship fund remains a critical part of the support the JRS community offers refugee friends: providing regular support to help meet the chronic needs of destitution without recourse to public funds, alongside discretionary support for acute and immediate need.

The hardship fund provides **346 refugee friends** with:

- £15 every two weeks
- £10 mobile phone top-up each month
- discretionary grants for pregnant refugee friends/new parents to purchase essentials
- education grants to provide materials required for their course
- discretionary grants for refugee friends who are street homeless to help buy food, water, and meet essential needs whilst the JRS team support access to stable accommodation
- discretionary grants for passport photos when needed for legal case and ID documents



## Become a friend of JRS

JRS UK is only able to offer access to the hardship fund thanks to the generosity of supporters who donate to JRS UK every month, meaning refugee friends, like Juliet, can continue to rely on the Equals Card, alongside ongoing support and advice from the JRS team.

Learn more about becoming a friend of JRS: [www.jrsuk.net](http://www.jrsuk.net) or call us and ask to speak to Ruth 020 7488 7310

# Hosted in the Virtual Spaces

**Hannah joined the JRS UK team in January 2021 to co-ordinate the At Home hosting scheme: a hosting scheme offering homeless asylum seekers a moment of respite in the spare room of volunteer hosts. Hannah shares some of the – often hilarious – practicalities of coordinating a hosting scheme over Zoom, and what she's learnt so far.**



**Hosting is very personal exchange between host and a guest. It's the flowers handed to a guest who nervously enters a hosting placement or the Eritrean coffee ritual prepared by a guest for a grateful host. It's leaving the living room door ajar for a more private guest to feel welcome. It's a host finding out that they are allergic to cumin when an adventurous cook feels comfortable enough to share their recipes.**

January 2021 was certainly an interesting time to assume a role of coordinating these personal encounters under the same (sometimes locked down) roof.

*"I also make this appeal to journey together towards an ever wider "we" to all men and women, for the sake of renewing the human family, building together a future of justice and peace, and that no one is left behind."*

Pope Francis, Message for 107<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees

## The virtual space of matching host and guest

As I got to know the hosts and the guests, I found myself hosted in virtual spaces between the guest and host. Matching meetings would happen over crackling connections, freezing between conversations around morning routines and dietary requirements. Guests would jokingly exaggerate their height, aware that I could only see their shoulders. I called hosts, asking them to count the number of their stairs from their front door to the guests' bedroom to assess mobility access, never having set foot in the house. Some

guests learnt to use zoom for the first time in what was already a nerve-wracking experience of meeting their future roommates. I sneezed on my phone multiple times as I performed multiple demonstrations of lateral flow tests over Whatsapp video call for guests to test themselves on moving day. Guests, hosts, and I would coordinate virtual tea-sipping sessions to ground discussions about the hosting placement.

I was hosted in another virtual space when hosts came together to share their experiences of hosting in one of our quarterly hosting meetings. Hosts swapped tips from everything from how to make a guest feel independent in grocery provision to the call that nudged them to open their homes to our refugee friends.

As matching processes, meetings, and host recruitment resume in person, I am grateful to be able to put a non-pixelated face (and a height) to hosts and guests. Most of all, I am humbled by hosting I have been shown in the virtual spaces created by host and guest; as I learn more about the coordination and incubation of hospitality.



*Fr Bart chatting to a refugee friend, who is hosted in their parish.*



# URGENT need for volunteer hosts: can you help?

At this moment in time, the JRS At Home hosting scheme is in URGENT need of hosts. COVID has left more and more asylum seekers without places to stay and some of our long-standing hosts have had to withdraw from the scheme because of their own health concerns.

There is a lot in an asylum seeker's life that is outside of their control simply because of what their immigration status – their 'papers' – say they can and cannot access. We've seen the impact stable and welcoming accommodation offers: it is a necessary first step to rebuild lives, bringing a semblance of normalcy – and humanity – to a complex asylum process.

As one of the refugee guests describes: *"Hosting was like I was escaping. I didn't expect too much... I just want the certainty of a place where there will be peace and you will be considered as a human being."*

Hosting is not a one-way street: hosts have learnt and shared much more than offering shelter. Sometimes accompaniment is as complex and

## JRS' At Home hosting scheme

For over five years, At Home has paired destitute refugee friends struggling with a complex and often hostile legal process with host families or communities, who agree to host a refugee friend for a three-month placement. Everyone we host through this scheme is registered with JRS and supported by our casework team. At Home provides security and respite for appeals rights exhausted asylum seekers who receive no support from the government and are left completely destitute.

simple as a cup of Ethiopian coffee – where host and guest become almost indistinguishable: *"It is just such a privilege. Most people in life you meet for a short amount of time and you get a general impression of things. But if somebody is actually there, then there's the possibility to have a proper conversation and really learn."*

## Can you help us provide hospitality and welcome?

If you are a home owner in the Greater London area with a spare room and hospitality to share or would like more information about the project, please get in touch with Hannah to learn more: [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net) or **020 7488 7310**



Keith and refugee friend enjoying a coffee together.

## Not in London, but wanting to support hosting?



JRS works closely with Refugees at Home, who are able to offer hosting placements to refugee friends across the country. Refugees at Home are currently looking for volunteers, as Lauren from Refugees at Home explains:

*"We are particularly looking for Home Visitors to help assess potential hosts. Home Visitors are volunteers with a professional background in making home assessments. Their role is to meet with a prospective host and discuss how hosting works, what hosts can expect and what hosts need to be aware of. The Home Visitor then sends their assessment to our team for approval. It's a key role which helps hosting placements succeed!"*

Find out more about the role on the Refugee at Home website [www.refugeesathome.org/get-involved](http://www.refugeesathome.org/get-involved) or call **0300 365 4724**

# The familiarity of meeting person-person

**Heathrow immigration detention centres have been closed for face-to-face external visitors throughout the pandemic. JRS volunteers have continued to accompany people in detention over the phone, looking forward to the time when face-to-face visits are allowed again. Volunteer visitor, Mark, reflects on his recent returning to physically visiting people at Harmondsworth detention centre.**

**Familiarity finds us in the darkest, most unfamiliar places; even in that big cold visitors hall with a painted mural of a smiling – or snarling – shark staring out from behind the guard's desk.**

It's been so long, there should have been at least a frisson of anxiety at the thought of locking horns once more with all the little indignities involved in visiting Harmondsworth detention centre: that choking routine of security checks and awkward silences; the embarrassment; the unerring sense of one's own insignificance.

Instead, a skip of the heart: a little skip, a child's skip, perhaps. And no sign of the usual, stifling awkwardness. Could it be that this marked the resumption of something familiar, suspended too long – something that reaches a part of us that other experiences can't – and that helps put everything else in perspective?

We tend to surround familiarity with negative connotations – as in 'familiarity breeds contempt'. But as the shark stared me out from the wall of the visitors hall, I found myself wondering if that's not perhaps a bit unfair, a bit one-sided.

Familiarity implies certainty, a confidence that what was, is – and shall forever be – thus. It involves a lexicon of genuine comfort: kindness, goodwill, fellow feeling, effortlessness, compatibility, ease, confidence, solidarity, certainty, reassurance, being yourself. Stretch it a bit and you can include intimacy – the kind that comes only with one whose love is certain, tested, resolute, 'familiar' – no matter the obstacles, the impossibilities that life may throw its way; the impact of our own foibles, weaknesses and petty (and not so petty) selfishnesses; disagreements, arguments, temporary fallings out; the kind of love that allows you to speak, comfortably, in your own voice. You can see where this is going. Think of your best friend, the love of your life; think – if you will – of God.

## A melting together of change and familiar

Back at Harmondsworth, the changes strike you first, of course. The banks of tables and chairs reduced to a handful. The paraphernalia of Covid: lateral flow tests, temperature checks, the now usual, once remarkable tediousness of pandemic life. All new, all designed – unwittingly or not – to gnaw away at our rootedness, our small grip on certainty in an age of uncertainty.

But then like a muscle memory, the familiar makes itself felt here too: the same mix of guards – the friendly and the officious; the sticky pound coin locker slots; the reliably broken drinks machine. At heart it's a metaphorical strip search, the removal of your life outside and the self that inhabits it. One familiar world is left behind for an hour or so; another takes its place as you find yourself face to face with that most universal of creatures – another person in extremis; alone, lonely and anguished.

And then – if you listen to your naked heart – another kind of familiarity kicks in too; the love is unlocked, just a drip or a dribble perhaps, understated and awkward, but undeniable, unique in what it brings to our humanity: the recognition of another, suffering human being as – for that blink of an eye – the only thing that matters, the still centre of the turning world.

## Accompany Mark and people in detention in prayer

**On the first Friday of each month, members of the JRS Detention Outreach Team share an e-mail reflection and prayer for people held in immigration detention.**

**Subscribe: [www.jrsuk.net/subscribe](http://www.jrsuk.net/subscribe)**



## Meet: Ruth *Fundraising Manager*



Ruth is delighted to be working for a Jesuit organisation again, having started her journey with The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice in Toronto, Canada over 20 years ago. Since then, Ruth continued to be drawn to working with faith-based organisations, including a Jewish food security charity and a Buddhist meditation centre. A professionally-trained vegetarian chef, for many years Ruth pursued both careers, combining freelance fundraising with culinary gigs in Europe, Canada and the United States. She is looking forward to demonstrating her cooking skills in JRS' kitchen when we are all safely back.

## Little Amal: Join 'The Walk'



At its heart is 'Little Amal', a 3.5 metre tall puppet of a little girl, representing displaced children everywhere. She is animated by a relay team of 9 puppeteers, 3 at a time, one of whom is Girum Bikele: a young refugee from Eritrea, who met the Theatre of Hope in Calais and went on to perform in *The Jungle*.

Little Amal will travel 8,000 kilometres. Having left Gaziantep, Turkey in July, she will end her journey in Manchester in November. As she makes her way through Turkey, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, France and the UK, she is being met by Acts of Welcome from a wide variety of community groups inspired by her message.

At time of writing, Little Amal was on her way from Greece to Italy. She is expected in the UK on the 18th of October, when she will arrive in Folkestone and walk to Canterbury, Lewisham, Central London, Oxford, Coventry, Birmingham, Sheffield and finally Manchester.

JRS UK is looking forward to welcoming Little Amal to the UK!

Inspired by the spectacular Sultan's Elephant performance in 2006, which brought millions of people into the streets of London, the work of the famous Handspring Puppet Company (creators of the Warhorse puppets), and their own successful play, *The Jungle*, The Good Chance Theatre has conceived of 'The Walk.'

In their words, The Walk is a "travelling festival of art and hope in support of refugees".

Details of where to see Little Amal, as well as more information about the project can be found at: [www.walkwithamal.org](http://www.walkwithamal.org)

JRS UK will be organising a small group to visit Little Amal when she's in London – subscribe to our weekly e-updates to keep up-to-date: [www.jrsuk.net/subscribe](http://www.jrsuk.net/subscribe)



# Refugee Gifts:



**Gifts to delight  
your loved ones  
and support  
destitute refugees  
in the UK at the  
same time.**



[www.jrsuk.net/refugeegifts](http://www.jrsuk.net/refugeegifts)

## 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 7310

Email [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net)

Visit [www.jrsuk.net/donate](http://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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