

Together

NEWS FROM JRS UK
SPRING 2025



accompany | serve | advocate

“If you can make people laugh, I think that is a great gift”

Martin, Volunteer

Fleeing the war in Somalia, Fardusa shares her journey towards peace

My name means “paradise” in Somali, but I was born to the hell of an endless war. I don’t know what life was like before the war.

As a child, it felt like I was in a film. The bombs exploding at the market and the bullets flying past all felt like special effects staged by a director.

I did not, however, experience the war as a spectator; I have it etched onto my body.

I decided to go, to leave Somalia forever in search of peace. The day I said goodbye to my parents for the last time was the hardest day of my life, because I didn’t know if I would ever see them again.

During the journey, I passed through many countries: Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, and Libya. There were 30 of us when we entered the desert.

I can still picture the despair in the eyes of those who, step after step, gradually realised they wouldn’t make it.

They locked us in the dark, in the back of a truck, with our hands and feet tied with rope to prevent us from escaping.

In Libya, they kept us in a small room for days without food or water, as they waited to send us across the sea.



A woman with her son in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia (Jesuit Refugee Service).

When I saw the small boat, I was afraid; I wanted to turn back. They pointed a gun at the back of my neck and forced me to choose between certain and almost certain death.

After a few hours of travel, the boat’s engine broke down. We were stranded at sea for five interminable days.

I can still taste the salt on my tongue, growing ever more intense with each new wave.

I wanted to turn back, I wanted to return to my blood-soaked land that will always smell of home; I wanted to go back to my family so as not to die alone, without roots, on an unforgiving sea.

The Italian Coast Guard rescued us. When my feet finally touched solid ground, a new light took hold inside of me—the light of someone who knows there is still plenty of life left to tread.

**Testimony of Fardusa, a Somali woman, accompanied by [Centro Astalli/JRS Italy](#).*

Message from the editor



This year, the Catholic Church is celebrating a Jubilee Year. In the Old Testament the Jubilee was a time for the forgiveness of debts, the liberation of prisoners, and the return of land and property to rightful owners.

The theme of this Jubilee is 'Pilgrims of Hope': we are called to renew our own hope, and to come together to offer hope to others, especially people living on the margins.

This includes people seeking sanctuary. In the words of Pope Francis: ***"Signs of hope should also be present for migrants who leave their homelands behind in search of a better life for themselves and for their families"***

As I write, there are news stories of bodies found in detention centres in Libya, of concerns about Ukrainians being excluded from peace talks about their future, and of US freezes to funding impacting humanitarian projects around the world (including JRS work in Chad, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, South Africa, South Sudan, Thailand, and Uganda).

Here in the UK, the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill is making its way through Parliament. Though we welcome the repeal of particularly harmful bits of legislation, it's a missed opportunity to create a fair and humane asylum system. Instead, the Bill pursues further

securitisation of our borders and introduces new offences that will criminalise refugees. Consistently associating 'national security' with people seeking sanctuary stokes division and distrust, framing seeking asylum as a threat. It is not hard to see the dangers of this: less than a year ago the country was shocked by criminal violence targeting people seeking sanctuary.

The Bill also includes provisions to expand the use of immigration detention. Detention is harmful to physical and mental health, and the lack of judicial oversight, time limit, and safeguarding are hugely concerning, as Aaden's story, on pages 4 and 5, highlights.

With all going on, I'm sure you'll agree that hope is much needed. I'm glad to say that in this edition, there are many people and voices who stand out as **'signs of hope'**.

On page 6, Martin shares his reflections on accompanying Farrokh, and on page 8, Loddan reflects on her conversations with Zein, a man taking part in new drama workshops in Colnbrook detention centre. Also in this edition of Together, we hear about a community of refugees coming together through our new sewing workshop, and from two young adults fundraising for JRS UK.

Standing together, we can be a sign of hope for others. I am so grateful you're walking with us this Lent as we continue to bring hope and advocate for change.

Victoria

Victoria

Senior Communications and Engagement Officer

JRS' statement on the Israel-Hamas ceasefire

JRS International welcomes the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, marking a crucial step towards alleviating the suffering from 15 months of brutal conflict. Since October 7, 2023, the conflict has claimed at least 48,200 lives, including over 46,600 Palestinians and 1,600 Israelis. Many more bodies remain buried under the rubble of homes, hospitals, businesses, and schools in Gaza. JRS emphasises the following priorities:

1. Full Adherence to Ceasefire

Terms: All parties must comply with the ceasefire, including the release of Israeli hostages

and Palestinian detainees, and facilitate humanitarian aid to Gaza's civilians.

2. Unhindered Humanitarian Access:

Blockades must be lifted to allow aid to reach those in urgent need. Essential services like electricity and water must be restored.

3. Protection of Civilians and Infrastructure:

All parties must follow international law, protecting civilians and critical infrastructure. Displaced Palestinians must be allowed to return home safely and be supported in rebuilding their lives.

4. Accountability and Justice:

Those responsible for violations of international law, including war crimes, must be held accountable to prevent future atrocities and uphold human rights. Fact-finding missions and international courts' work must be respected.

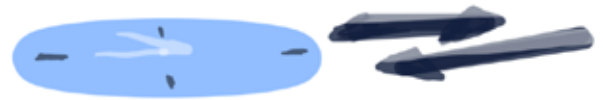
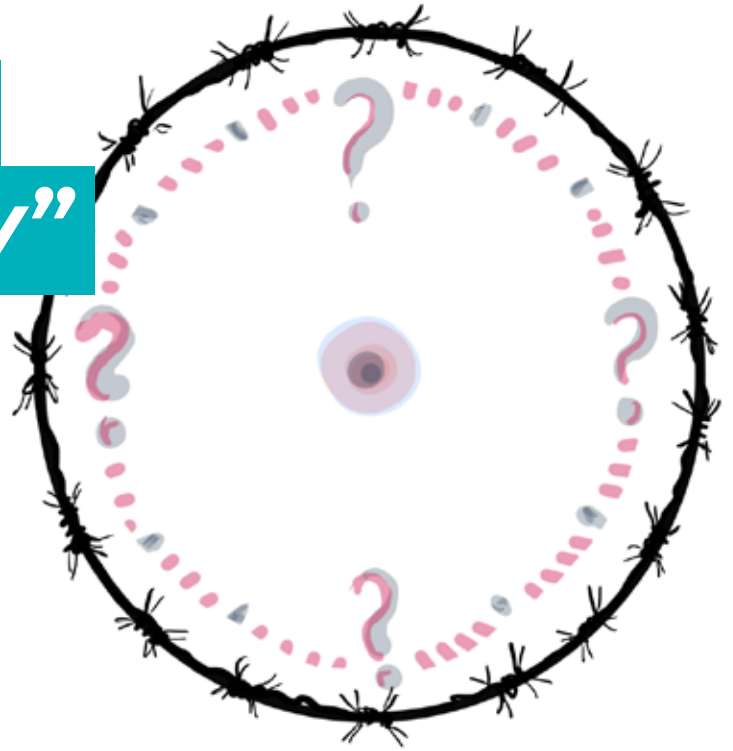
5. Commitment to Lasting Peace:

The international community must work towards a permanent ceasefire and address the conflict's root causes, including Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories.

“His life is just passing him by”

Aaden*, a young man supported by JRS UK’s Detention Outreach team, was detained in Harmondsworth IRC for nearly two years.

Sr Kathryn SSC visited him towards the end of his time in detention, and shares a little about this experience here.



Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I was born and brought up in Liverpool, and joined the Columban Sisters after my A-levels in 1964. I liked them for their simplicity of life.

I was trained in London and went to London University, and then I was sent to Uganda for 40 years, where I taught in a secondary school in the north of the country. After that I spent some time in Scotland and Italy, and then finally came back to London in January 2023.

Is that when you first started volunteering? How did you first hear of JRS?

Oh, everybody knows JRS!

I first met JRS when I was in Uganda – Uganda has always welcomed refugees from other places in Africa. Because of the conflicts in South Sudan, many Sudanese came into the north of Uganda. There were Jesuits working in the refugee camps there.

When I came back to the UK, I knew I wanted to work with people seeking safety because I’ve seen the situation of life elsewhere in the world and I can understand why people move.

What were your first impressions of detention?

I suppose I did know that detention was like prison – but **it was really like prison**. I found it quite hard. It’s a tall building, with box rooms. Security is super strict, and you’re always escorted everywhere.

When you go in as a visitor, they pat you down and make sure you’re not carrying anything with you.

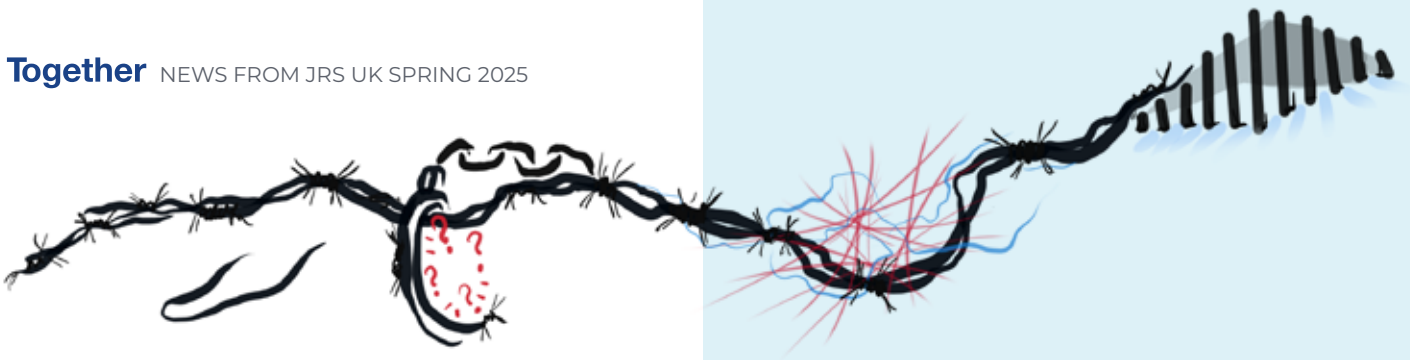
I was visiting a man named Aaden*, a man in his 30s who had been in detention for more than two years.

At our first meeting, Aaden’s uncle was also visiting at the same time, and so the three of us had a very easy going conversation, and the hour passed very quickly.

In our other meetings, **I would tell him something of myself, and he would tell me something of himself**. Aaden was very good at football, and loved painting, so he would tell me about his artwork.

Can you tell us more about Aaden?

Aaden had been in the country since primary school, and had been educated up to college level, which is when he got into trouble and ended up in Harmondsworth, under threat of deportation.



Detention was not the right place for him. Aaden has been diagnosed with a severe mental health condition. Staff in detention are not equipped to deal with people with complex needs; at one point while detained, he ceased taking his medication for over a year and suffered a catastrophic deterioration in his mental health. He never sought out support, he did not appeal any of the Home Office decisions, and he did not read paperwork. JRS noticed him in detention and over a long period of time, built up rapport and trust and were finally able to engage legal representation.

Sadly, Aaden was, without notice, released into street homelessness, with no support in place, in the middle of an extreme mental health crisis. Within a matter of days, he had come to the attention of the police and back into the system he went, back to prison, and from there to detention again.

With the help of JRS UK's Detention Outreach team, Aaden was released from detention. When he was released, he was put into Home Office accommodation, but it was outside London – which was a shame because he was then cut off from the circle of people he could rely on for support. No-one was there to help him. JRS UK accompanied him to hospital to request urgent mental health support, but he was deemed not quite ill enough.

With time, his condition did deteriorate, and **eventually, after a long period of not taking his medication, he disappeared for a while, making his way back to London to where he had been brought up. During this episode he failed to contact his probation officer and so was recalled to prison. Back into the system he went, always falling through the gaps. It is hard to see him there.**

I don't think Britain is treating Aaden right. He hasn't received the support he needs for his mental illness, and until he does I think he will end up in prison and in detention over and over again. He's been in the country since he was a young child, and he's now in his 30s. He has spent his life here. To

deport him to a place he doesn't know is absolutely ridiculous. He really is a nice young man, and **his life is just passing him by** because he doesn't know how to deal with his life.

Do you have any other reflections on detention?

I don't think there's anything positive about detention. People are side lined and forgotten about, until one day maybe a decision is made.

I don't see there's anything constructive or creative or helpful about detention. It is prison - people are deprived of their freedoms, they have no say in how long they're there for, what time they go to bed, or when the lights are on or off, who they mix with.

It's prison under another name, and yet the majority of people in there haven't broken the law. Or, if they have, they have already served time in prison, and often need real support, like Aaden. I think detention is just a parking space for people, and I don't see the point.

You know, I think a lot about the money that they've spent on building and staffing these places. If they could channel some of that money into the people who are detained, and helping them get representation, the money would be much better spent.

Visting and accompanying Aaden, and the experience of seeing detention centres, has definitely awakened in me a greater interest in politics. I think it's just **the common decency of every human being – that we bother that our neighbour is in a good space** and is okay and is looked after. We want people to get the best that they can.

With your support, JRS UK can continue to accompany hundreds of people in detention every year, providing practical, pastoral, and spiritual support.

Find out more and donate to our Lent Appeal at www.jrsuk.net/lent

“It is a great gift to make people laugh”



Martin shares his experiences of providing post-detention accompaniment for Farrokh

JRS UK’s Detention Outreach Team supports people detained near Heathrow Airport. They offer practical help and casework assistance, and thanks to a wonderful team of volunteers, provide emotional and befriending support. Although the majority of people who are detained are released back into the community, the damaging impact of detention can continue to affect individuals long after release.

My name is Martin, and I have been providing phone accompaniment for Farrokh since 2020.

Before the pandemic, I had been a social visitor with JRS UK, visiting people in Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre.

When the pandemic put a pause on social visits, I was put in touch with Farrokh, who had just been released from detention, and we have been talking together on the phone ever since.

Over the years, Farrokh and I have celebrated Christmases, birthdays, family events, and festivals together. We talk about international politics, about current affairs, about what is happening with our families. He calls me grandpa, which I think is rather affectionate.

He doesn’t talk too much about life in detention, and I haven’t pushed him on that – he doesn’t want to keep thinking about his experiences in detention.

In accompanying Farrokh, I walk with him through the tribulations of hope, expectation and disappointment surrounding every step of the asylum process.

We have been frustrated time and again: the asylum and appeals process is lengthy and

entrenched, with each stage of the process leading to another significant delay and the years are added to the calendar.

Farrokh was tortured in his home country, Iran, but while the Home Office agree this is true, they say he *wasn’t tortured enough to warrant refugee status.*

Farrokh’s situation has now been going on for years. At these times I have to bolster him up and encourage him to keep going.

I have the ability to make people laugh, and if you can make people laugh, I think that is a great gift. It gets people outside of themselves, and I’m fortunate enough to be able to do that.

Farrokh seems to value my calls, and I think JRS UK is really doing him good: he feels there’s an organisation that’s really on his side.

At the moment, we are working with another charity on a new appeal which will be soon. We hope this will finally bring the case to a close, and that Farrokh will be able to start to live his life again.

Farrokh is a qualified HGV truck driver, and I know someone who runs a haulage company, who has offered him a job once his asylum case is resolved, and he has the right to work.

Over the years, I have visited six people in detention at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook. Five of those people were eventually granted leave to remain, and I hope Farrokh will be too.

Please keep Farrokh in your prayers.

Serving people in detention

What is detention?

Immigration detention is the holding of people in prison-like conditions, ostensibly for the purpose of administration (i.e. to facilitate removal or to examine immigration status).

Who can be detained?

Anyone subject to immigration control can be detained. Many people refused asylum are detained. Often, they are eventually recognised as refugees. Other people are detained when they fall through the cracks of our complex immigration system. People are also transferred to detention after completing custodial sentences. Some of the people detained in these circumstances have spent all or most of their lives in Britain, and face removal to somewhere where they have no connections.

What is detention like?

Detention centres resemble prisons: they are heavily securitized, behind high walls and barbed wire. The way people can spend their time is controlled. Many detention centres are built to the specifications of category-B prisons.



JRS UK has been involved in detention outreach since even **before** we were formally established. In the early 1980s, **Brother Bernard Elliot SJ** noticed the difficult conditions faced by the Vietnamese community held in detention at Heathrow and formed a team to support them. Over the years, our reputation for providing support has grown, and we now offer a wide range of services, including legal advice, practical help, classes and activities for people seeking sanctuary.

Our work in detention remains an important focus, especially providing assistance to people at Colnbrook and Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centres near Heathrow. Our work includes practical assistance and casework, as well as emotional and pastoral support. Recently, we have also introduced drama workshops for detainees.

We are deeply concerned about plans to expand the immigration detention estate, including the reopening of Haslar and Campsfield detention centres. Since summer, there has been an increase in the use of charter flights to remove people from the UK, with more people potentially being sent back to dangerous situations. The legal aid crisis has made it difficult for many people to access legal advice, leading to missed appeal deadlines and a worsening of the justice situation in detention.

We are particularly worried about the increased detention of trafficking survivors and have collaborated with other organisations to challenge recent policy changes that have weakened protections for people in this situation.

We are continuing to advocate for more humane policies and ultimately an end to immigration, emphasizing the profound damage and systematic abuse as highlighted by the findings of the Brook House Inquiry and our own research, *After Brook House: continued abuse in immigration detention*.

Drama as a lifeline

Lodan, Communications and Events Assistant

Recently, I had the honour of meeting Zein*, one of the people supported by our Detention Outreach team at Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre.



Meeting Zein was a stark reminder of the harsh realities of detention and isolation. In our time together, he spoke candidly about the turbulence of daily life – from the challenges of sharing confined spaces, disrupted sleep, and the immense strain on mental health. In such conditions, creative outlets, such as the drama workshops facilitated by JRS UK, become more than just hobbies – they are lifelines.

“Without the drama workshops, I’d just be lying in bed, watching TV,” Zein told me. “These activities make my day and keep my mind active.” Zein described how the weekly sessions have given him respite and rest in a hostile setting: “Drama is a way to take yourself out of daily life. It helps you embody different emotions and energies, which I’ve found really helpful in real-life situations.”



Drama has built his confidence and given him a renewed appreciation for storytelling. “I’ve always loved creating. In the drama workshops, my method of embodying a character is a slow process, where I gradually explore the emotions and thoughts of the character. Mark, our drama facilitator, leads us through exercises to unlock emotions that deepen our connection to the performance. This is sometimes difficult, and pushes me outside of my comfort zone, but it’s also a way in which I explore my own feelings”.

Outside of the workshops, Zein continues to think about drama as a means of channeling emotion: when he watches TV, he pays attention to the actors’ techniques and how they bring characters to life.

When I asked what keeps him hopeful, Zein said, “To start a new life after I leave detention. That’s all I think about.” He dreams of reconnecting with his son and using the skills he’s gained through workshops to build a brighter future. “I would absolutely want to take part in the drama workshops that JRS UK runs at the centre if I’m accommodated in London post-detention,” he told me. “These workshops have motivated me and kept my interests alive.”

Zein’s story is a powerful reminder of the role creativity plays in resilience and healing. Creative and therapeutic activities are vital in accompanying and empowering people in detention.



& Sew On: more than stitches and fabric

“Sewing is more than stitches and fabric; it is patience, precision, and the art of bringing creativity to life—one thread at a time.”

A member of ‘& Sew On...’

As the workshops grow, so does the confidence and pride of the expert sewers leading them. Our sewing leaders have seen others learn and develop their skills over time, strengthening the sense of community they have built.

Friendships among the group have flourished and the community has grown to provide peer-support to each other. The workshops are also an opportunity for refugee friends to tangibly offer solidarity and support other refugee friends, particularly people held in detention, through their donated tote bags.

We have been deeply moved by the kind donations of sewing machines and equipment by supporters. Without that support, the workshops and community would not have been able to take off and we would have only been able to run workshops for small numbers of people at a time.

The community of experts are continuing their workshops with refugee friends this year and have dreams of offering the workshops to the public! Watch this space!

‘& Sew On...’ is our exciting new sewing activity, bringing together expert sewers who meet weekly to lead workshops to teach others how to sew. The community formed last year to recognise and celebrate the wealth of sewing expertise at JRS UK, and includes people from all over the world, including DRC, Hong Kong, India, Peru and the UK, all with different immigration status and citizenship.

The workshops introduce participants to the basics of sewing, including how to operate sewing machines, cut fabric, and learn patterns. By the end of the workshops, people have made their own tote bag – one to keep and an additional one to donate to people leaving detention who have no means to carry their belongings.

Refugee friends, volunteers, and staff who have participated in the workshops have enjoyed learning new skills in a supportive community, acquiring practical skills which can help propel them in their everyday lives – such as mending clothing, whilst finding relaxation and social connection.

If you would like to support the group, you can donate sewing machines, strong fabrics, and ironing rules. (If you are a confident sewer already, you can make your own tote bag and donate one to the people supported by our Detention Outreach team. The pattern is here: www.jrsuk.net/sewing)

From choir friends to Marathon runners for JRS UK!

Our incredible team of 35 runners is taking on the London Marathon this April - the largest team we've had to date - to raise funds for JRS UK!



Barbara and Dunstan's connection began at Farm Street Church, where they are both part of the young adults choir. This April, they'll trade hymn sheets for running shoes as they tackle the ultimate challenge of the London Marathon.

Why are you running for JRS UK?

Barbara: Prior to moving to London, I worked in humanitarian aid across Africa and Asia, including regions from which JRS' refugee friends have fled. So, I feel a closeness to this group and the work JRS UK does.

I've also previously volunteered with JRS UK, teaching piano to some of the women at Emilie House. These encounters have deepened my empathy for the hardships refugees face - both in fleeing their homes and in adjusting to life in the UK.

So, knowing JRS UK, and seeing the opportunity to help refugee friends further, I decided to sign up to fundraise by running the London Marathon.

I think it's a meaningful way to act in solidarity. I believe we are called to share our talents. That's inspired by my faith - asking, 'What gifts do I have, and how can I offer them to others?'

Dunstan: As part of my training within the Jesuit formation, I've been working with JRS UK for the past year, creating spaces of encounter, trust,

and understanding between refugees and local people. I'm learning what it means to be part of the Jesuit tradition and finding my place within it.

There's a phrase about a Jesuit being 'a man for others and a man with others.' JRS UK is a place where I can be with people in their initiatives and endeavours.

I've attended the London Marathon to cheer on the JRS UK team in the past, and the sense of togetherness was so inspiring. I wanted to be one of the runners this year!

You've both referenced your faith motivating you to accompany refugees: can you tell us more?

Dunstan: I suppose there are some phrases from my faith tradition which are important to me. One of these is, "Love one another." Another is, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."

I want to live a life of love. A life where I am, in some way, close to people who are seeking refuge.

Barbara: Yeah, I think my faith inspires me to act and to consider what actions I'm taking and the impact they have on people. Young professionals can be quite busy and time-poor.

I'm not always able to participate in activities with refugee friends because they're often during the day when I'm working. So, this is an opportunity to still support the mission of JRS UK in a way that fits with the schedule I have.

I think my faith is really the inspiration to accompany refugees, and running the London Marathon and fundraising for the work of JRS UK is one way to do it.

How is training going?

Barbara: I was really proud of myself in early January when it was sub-zero temperatures, and I still went out for a run. Or when I was back home in Canada over Christmas—I went out for a run in the snow on Christmas Day. I was really happy with myself for being able to do that.

Dunstan: My training is coming along slowly! I'm sticking to my 16-week plan, which I downloaded from the London Marathon website.

I used to run regularly in school and at university, even joining a local running club. But when I started working, I fell out of the habit. More recently my runs have been sporadic and undisciplined, so it's been useful sticking to a plan.

It's a gradual process of building up the capacity to run again, and that's been really nice.



Barbara: Getting above the 10k mark in training was a highlight, because I hadn't run more than 10k in years. So just realising, "this is a quarter of a marathon! I'll be fine, I just have to do this four times!" was encouraging.

Whenever I reach a new distance - which in our long runs now is happening every week - it's very satisfying.

Dunstan: Running these distances is challenging, but being part of something like JRS brings joy and peace. There's a real sense of community, and that's been inspiring throughout this journey."

Who will cross the finish line first?

Barbara: "I thought I had a chance until Dunstan revealed his whole running history! Running is in his blood. He's been doing it since he was small. But, if we get an April snowstorm, then I have a chance!"

Support our Marathon runners!

On Sunday 27th April, 35 people are taking on the challenge of the historic London Marathon to raise vital funds for JRS UK's services to refugee friends.

Want to support our runners? Here are some ways of running with refugees:

- Donate to our fundraiser at www.justgiving.com/campaign/jrsuk-londonmarathon2025
- Cheer with us on **Marathon day!** We'll be stationed at the **13.5 and 22 miles** point to show support for team JRS UK. Find more details at www.jrsuk.net/london-marathon
- Pray for our runners. Fiona, Senior Fundraising Officer, shares her reflection and prayer for the team here: www.jrsuk.net/blog/pray-support-cheer

Support Jules as he takes on the London Marathon!

“When I was an asylum seeker, JRS UK supported me. Now that I have my refugee status, it’s my turn to give back my body to run to collect money so JRS UK can help more people.”

Read more about Jules’ training and motivations for running, and make a donation to his efforts at www.justgiving.com/page/jules-runs-for-jrs



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 and detained 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

Visit www.jrsuk.net/donate

Email uk@jrs.net

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



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