

# PROJECT 2: REFUGEE HELP

**Project Aim:** To help the integration of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs) into the local community  
**Project Team:** Libby Hedges (President), Toby Pattinson, Ben Coulson, Elliot Crossley, Sophia Breese & Charlie Ockleston

## Background

The project started initially when Libby had a conversation with someone she was babysitting for, who had met Wendu Wole from Refugee Action, a charity which helps refugees to the UK. Shrewsbury had recently received a group of 15-17 year olds as part of the government programme to help unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Syria. Wendu mentioned that the group needed help in integrating into the local community and Libby jumped on this as a possible project.

We were grateful to a local Youth Club, who had offered their venue for the group to meet, as we believed that meeting the refugees in their space would help them feel a lot more comfortable around us. However, conversations were flowing very quickly and everyone was playing pool, cooking traditional Kurdish food and learning Kurdish dancing!

## Initial Plan

We had learned from a failed previous project that it was important to work out what the needs were before planning anything further. During our first meeting, we asked Wendu and more importantly the sixteen teenagers what they thought would be helpful to them. These were some of the early ideas:

- Informal English speaking lessons and practice
- Joint sports matches
- Cooking sessions



## Instant Impact

Apart from going to the Youth Club, to get to know the refugees better we set up a weekly 7-a-side football match at Shrewsbury Town FC with mixed teams of Shrewsbury School pupils and refugees. We learned quickly that sport is an instant ice-breaker and bonding exercise; despite our very different backgrounds, we were able to share the same love of football. One thing we did not realise was that the refugees did not have sports kit – thankfully, our school donated some so we could start this quickly.

During one of our weekly visits, one of the refugees, Yergul, said that one of the things he missed most was playing cricket. Libby got in touch with a coach at the local cricket club, Shrewsbury CC, who arranged a 1-1

initial session. Following this, the club have offered him free membership, weekly training sessions and he is now playing for their 4<sup>th</sup> Team and loving it!

In addition, we were very grateful to Shrewsbury Town, under Amnesty

International and the FA's [#footballwelcomes](#) campaign, for giving us 25 tickets for a recent match vs MK Dons, where we were able to share more experiences. As you can see from the photo (left), seeing the faces of the children light up whilst they sang the Shrewsbury Town chants will stay with us forever. It's great to know that this improved their integration into the community, with so many fans, young and old, coming and sitting with us to just get to know these people.



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## What have we learned

By far the most interesting thing we have learned has been the stories of each of the refugees. For example, Yergul has not seen his mother in three years, travelling via Turkey and the Calais Jungle. He had not received any formal education in Afghanistan and worked as a shepherd for his uncle. However, from talking to him, it is clear he is passionate about making the most of every opportunity in the UK, so he can support the family he has left back in Afghanistan. Another example is Hassan, who travelled from Sudan and spent 2 years alone in the Calais Jungle. Since settling in Shrewsbury with another boy from Sudan, he has tried so hard to help communities back home. Most recently, he has raised money by running the Shrewsbury Half Marathon to aid education in Ghana, a place he wishes to visit in the next summer with a group from the National Citizenship Service.

Though we have had good lessons in broadening our horizons at school, it is by getting to know people like Yergul and Hassan that we can understand the real importance of securing a decent education and breaking down barriers across the world.

One thing that really surprised us when we launched this project was the lack of awareness in the Shrewsbury area about the young refugees. Though there has been some hostility by people who oppose immigration, we have been delighted with the support the local community have given the teenagers. Where Refugee Action have been amazing in settling them into the town and helping where they can, we feel really proud that we have been able to get tickets for football matches, cricket matches and festivals simply by explaining to the various companies how much it would mean to them. It really is the little things that make all the difference.



## The Future

Now that we have built up relationships, the most important thing is to maintain the momentum. Though in the short term we will continue with the same people attending the youth club, we intend on making the project long term and sustainable with new pupils joining next academic year. We also hope to develop new events, such as joint cooking and girls-only sessions, so that all interests are catered for. It is probable that more UASC refugees will come to Shrewsbury in the next few months and we are keen to help them from the start. Now that we have developed a good relationship with Refugee Action, it should not be difficult to carry this project on far into the future.

## Changing our outlook

Meeting the refugees has changed our outlook in everything we do, with many of them telling stories to us about how boosting their education was their key aim when they travelled individually from places like Iran, Eritrea and Afghanistan. To continue raising awareness of the plight of refugees and UASCs in particular, we hope to work with a charity called the

Ankawa Foundation, who specialise in teaching children in refugee camps in Northern Iraq.

## Thanks

We are very grateful to the following organisations, who have given so generously to help our project so far:

