



# GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP

*Autumn 2021*



*'Unbounded' by George Fitzsimons*

Our newsletter comes to you with thanks for your support and I hope it brings a blast of energy and positivity your way as we celebrate our community and all we have achieved in recent months. Thanks to our funders and to our volunteers who make all things possible.

I hope you enjoy reading reflections by a new trustee, a new visitor and a new walker. Read about our walks, our Refugee Tales walk in Canterbury in July, our meetings with MPs and enjoy the art work from self-advocacy creative

workshops. You'll find photographs and a recipe, poetry, a book review of Refugee Tales IV. Read about events we have taken part in and the giant book we presented to Little Amal. We hope to tempt you to buy our wonderful Christmas card design by Ruby Wright.

Thank you for reading about the joys and challenges of our work and I hope you find inspiration in this autumn edition.

*Anna Pincus*

## Thoughts on becoming a new visitor

*By Fern Warwick-Ching*

Volunteering has always played an important part in my life, from hand feeding fox cubs at a wildlife rescue centre to a paid role as the volunteer coordinator for a small charity. Offering my support to others helps me to maintain my sense of purpose and has a positive effect on my mental well-being. When I heard about the important work done by the GDWG at a talk given by a local political group, I put myself forward immediately. I had been growing uneasy for some time about the treatment of people who come to this country in search of safety and peace.

The application process takes a while, naturally, and was prolonged even further in my case by necessary Covid restrictions. But as a previous volunteer coordinator I recognise the need to keep things at a measured pace and deter those who may have acted on impulse and are unlikely to stay the course. The last thing the organisation wants is for someone to drop out after a short time as it risks disappointing detained people, who are already in a desperate situation. All this is clearly laid out in a - surprisingly - almost comical first group session where the CEO does her best to emphasise all the reasons why we SHOULD NOT volunteer. Those of us not easily dissuaded moved on to some long group training sessions, which actually flashed by and were extremely thorough. As a result, I was left feeling supported, ready to start and reassured that I had connected with a like-minded community.

The past few years have - at times - challenged even my natural optimism. But getting involved and making a positive contribution to causes I feel passionately about acts as an emotional counterbalance to what can feel like a growing sense of powerlessness. It can also reinforce essential myth-busting, as the volunteer will be able to bring experience and the knowledge gained supporting displaced people to the current conversation. The work of the GDWG couldn't be more necessary and relevant in the current climate and theirs is an essential alternative voice combating negative messages portrayed by significant parts of the media.

## Thoughts on Becoming a New Trustee

*By Harry Crossley*

I joined the GDWG in the middle of 2021 and am at the start of my journey to understand the depth and scale of the problems faced both by people in detention, and those seeking asylum here in the UK.

I have long been frustrated by the negative connotations put on immigration by successive governments and was appalled by the launch of the UK's hostile environment policy. That said, I hadn't fully realised the real-life impact of these policies until I started to read and listen to some of the compelling stories from the Refugee Tales. All this meant that I wanted to join an organisation that helps bring hope to people in need and that shows that there is some humanity in the world.

After the first few months, I'm starting to understand how GDWG operates. One

of the reasons I think it is successful is its multi-faceted approach - from the core work done directly supporting those in detention, to the broader support given by raising public awareness with the Refugee Tales and self-advocacy groups, the GDWG is helping tackle real issues from many directions.

The other reason for its success that I can see already is the positivity created by the staff and volunteers. As one of the other trustees succinctly put it, each person visited can have a harrowing tale to be told - but the work the GDWG is doing is precisely to help counter this by showing that there are people who want to care, help and support.

The more I find out about the work done by the GDWG, the more I realise the scale of the task it's undertaking - and I'm looking forward to being part of the team to support in any way I can!



## **Volunteers Guilt**

*By Adam Green*

Let me begin, let us not get delayed  
Volunteering is to work without getting paid  
But here is thing, it's a bit of a quirk  
meeting new people, doesn't feel much like work

It certainly was a good use of my time  
Meeting people with backgrounds, different from mine.  
People whose worlds have been full of drama  
From Palestine, Pakistan, Yemen and Ghana

Their lives dictated by geographical borders,  
No-entry signs, and endless court orders  
They've seen things I can't begin to comprehend  
And my only role was to give them a friend.

Someone to talk to, someone who cares  
And doesn't respond With disbelieving stares.  
Their identity ruled by the country they were born  
Some had reached the end and were looking forlorn.

They've all taught me things I'd not known before  
-The meaning of belonging, the impacts of war.  
-That my life is quite sheltered and how lucky I am,  
-And to have compassion for my fellow man.  
-That problems I have aren't problems at all.

-That, to others it would appear, that I have it all.

And I can't help but think as I take a break,  
Of all of the connections that I'll never make.  
But time is quite short and often forbids  
(With full time employment, and two lovely young kids),  
From being able to give the attention required,  
To be an inspiration, and to be inspired.

I'm truly grateful for the connections I've built  
By taking a break I have volunteers guilt.  
It's only a break, a short suspension.  
From visiting those in indefinite detention.

The good news is that there are more like me  
Like the other angels from GDWG  
Who still give their time with passion as well.  
To the poor immigrants trapped in home-office hell.

And although I am not visiting, I've still been reformed  
I'll still encourage others to get more informed.

Like the people who spout stuff they read in the mail  
But don't bother learning the complex detail  
Why have a view on something you don't understand  
Why tarnish the image of a diverse England

## **Notes on My First Visit**

*By Elfie*

I've been volunteering with GDWG for about a year and half, but last week was my first ever visit to Brook House, having only been providing telephone support until now due to Covid.

I have to admit that I was a little nervous - I've never done anything like this before and wasn't sure what to expect. However it was comforting to have Karris there too, showing me the ropes, and I realised very quickly that I had nothing to be nervous about.

Getting through security was a smooth and easy process. The first step was to do a lateral flow test, and then show some ID, put our belongings in lockers and we were through - all in no more than 15 minutes. Throughout the process the staff were very friendly and helpful, and there was a cheery atmosphere, which I hadn't been expecting.

I had anticipated my first meeting with the person I was visiting to be a little challenging, but we very quickly found common ground and some topics of conversation - how he spent his days in the centre, what his interests were outside of detention, discussing his current situation with his bail application etc. Despite some language barriers we found ways to communicate and overcame any points of confusion with a smile. The visit was not without a few awkward silences, but I'm hoping that as we get to know each other better the conversation will flow more easily over time.

Overall I left the centre feeling positive; I felt that my visit had been appreciated and he was keen to catch up again next week. I'm hoping that the meeting had given him something to break up the day, an opportunity to vent his frustrations to a listening ear, but also the chance to chat about normal everyday things that made him feel better. I'm looking forward to getting to know him more over the next few weeks.

## **After Detention - A Trip to the Zoo** *By Jamie Macpherson*



Samson was fascinated with the giraffes. He told us that they fought with their necks and could kill a person if they hit them with their head.



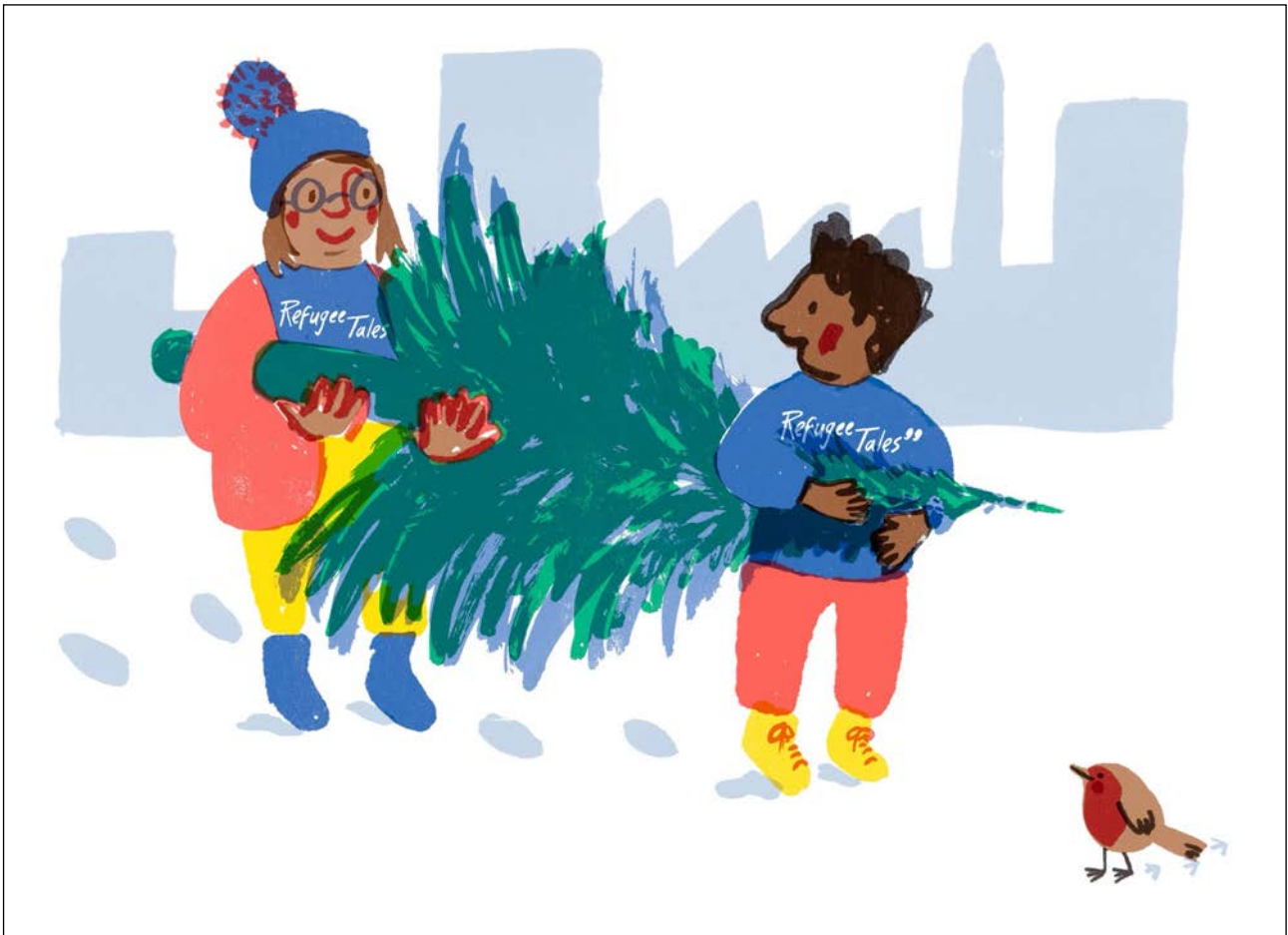
The tigers were majestic. It was hard to leave the enclosure. Lying there, the tigers looked so relaxed but you could tell they were powerful creatures. We were glad that we were separated by a strong steel fence.



The penguins were beautiful and very sociable. They looked awkward as they waddled about on land, but in the water they were graceful and fast. It seemed like they took turns watching the others swim whilst chattering away to each other. Perhaps they were giving scores for speed, agility and style.



We all had such a lovely time and Samson told us that it was the best day he'd had for a long time. It was a joy for us to share this experience with him.



## Christmas Cards Available to Buy Today!

We're delighted to share the new design for our 2021 Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Christmas card. Please send your orders to Frances ([frances@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:frances@gdwg.org.uk)) if you would like to order packs of 10 cards (10 cards for £4.99 plus postage). These will not be wrapped in cellophane and will be sent out with eco envelopes. The card design shows a little robin watching Refugee Tales walkers carrying a Christmas Tree in the snow and was designed for us by artist Ruby Wright (Instagram: [rubywrightlino](https://www.instagram.com/rubywrightlino)). Please show your support for our work and help others find out about our charity through sending the cards.

## Mohammed's Falafel Recipe

*The most encouraging recipe we have ever read!*

To be honest there is no recipe. It's just you need to get dried chickpeas. Some people were saying can you do it from the canned chickpeas? That's not going to work. You need to get dry ones and soak in water for minimum 8 hours. The other things are your choice, spice, it's up to you. You have to put salt and little bit coriander. Then all other things are your choices. I put little bit of cumin and little bit of black seeds - tiny, tiny black seeds, that's just my choices.

Then the main problem is oil. You have to have enough oil, it has to be deep oil, the whole falafel has to be in. If the oil is too hot, they're gonna burn outside and inside don't cook. If its too cold, it will

soak with oil. Other than that, its easy trust me!

After you soak the chickpeas, just wash properly to take off any dust. When you buy dry things maybe they have some little stones sometimes. After soaking you wash the, nicely then grind, but not very soft and not very crunchy, just a little bit in between. When you are making the little balls - if balls aren't coming together nicely add a little, little bit of water. They

aren't any rules, its very easy. Trust me you can do it.

Last time I put little bit green chilly, that's my preference. Maybe you can add some sesame seeds if you want to make it look a bit nicer. Just go ahead and try. If it's your first time, my advice is don't make too much, just like one cup of tea. Then you can make more if its good. As my teacher said - if you don't make mistakes you never learn!



## Photography

By Elyas Mamoori



'This photo is from the roof of St John's Hoxton Church, which is my first home in the UK and I have a very kind and loving family here. I met a lot of people in this church, we love and support each other. Many years ago, as a student, I became acquainted with Christ and Christianity through the art and architecture of churches, which is the greatest change in my life and my church has beautiful architecture and paintings that I love.'

## Introduction to photography by Elyas

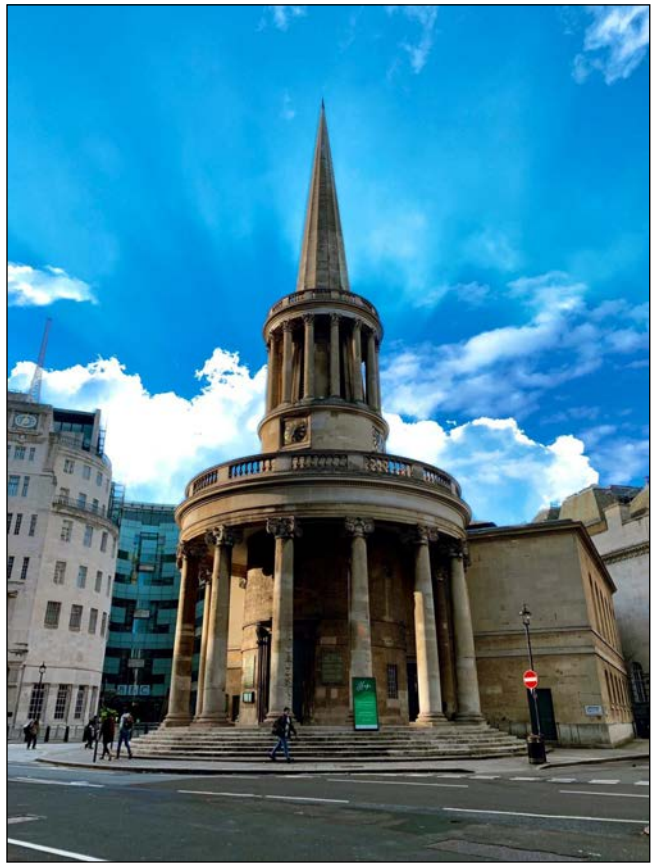
By Stephen

"It is so great to see Elyas' skills and passions come together in his beautiful

photographs - a number of them speak of his belonging, and active participation, within the church family in Hoxton demonstrated in his appreciation of the St John's Hoxton building and other church structures. They also speak of his experience as an architectural engineer, his love of light, contrasting textures and the appreciation of the significance of small details. And added to all of this is the fact that his photographs underline a deep appreciation for his new home city, London".









## Come and join our team

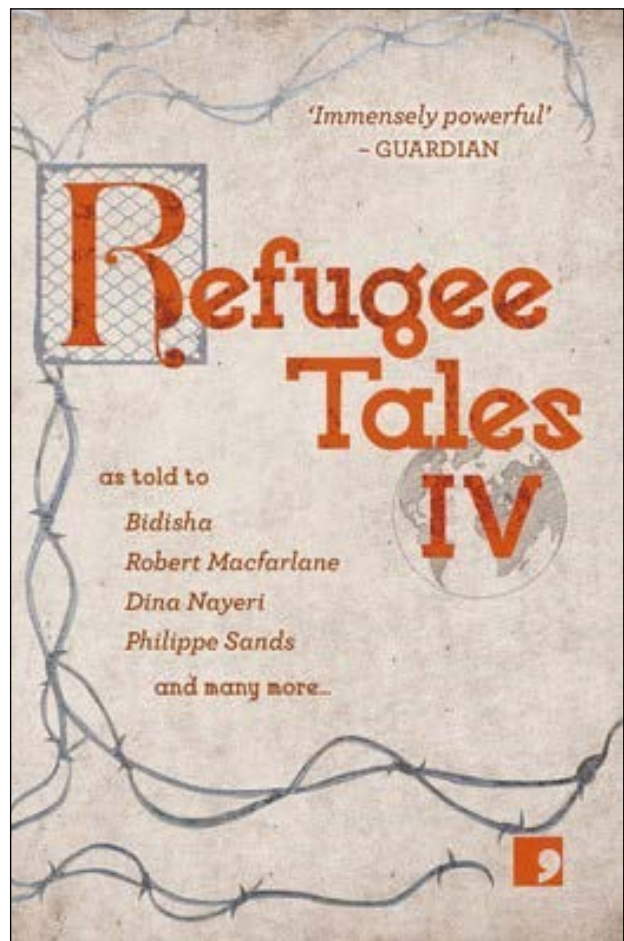
We have a wonderful opportunity to work with GDWG as an Advocacy Co-ordinator. Please share this great opportunity within your networks. Our small and determined frontline team is currently looking for applicants for the role of Detention Advocacy Coordinator. The role is blended working from home 3 days a week and from our office in Crawley 2 days a week. This is a one-year fixed term contract. In this role you will work with people in detention on casework, offer emotional support, coordinate a team of volunteers and lead on our outreach work in schools raising awareness of indefinite detention. The closing date for applications is 3rd December at 6pm and we are interviewing on 10th December, online or in person depending on preference, with the possibility of a follow up phone call and/or a meeting in person for shortlisted candidates at our office in Crawley. The salary is on a scale from £20,000 to £23,000 according to experience. Please contact Frances ([frances@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:frances@gdwg.org.uk)) if you would like the job description, person specification, monitoring form and application form or check out the details on our website. If you'd like to talk through all the job entails, please contact Karris ([karris@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:karris@gdwg.org.uk)) and we'll hope to hear from you!

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## Book Review

By Caroline Lodge

*Our thanks to Caroline Lodge for her permission for us to share an extract from her blog on Refugee Tales Volume 4. Caroline has supported refugees since she was a secondary school headteacher in inner London in the 90's. Caroline writes that 'stories are a great way to help people understand each other. I am inspired by the walking and storytelling of Refugee Tales. Over the years I have reviewed every collection of Refugee Tales on Bookword Blog, and I've walked over 25 Devon bridges in support, and I even own the T shirt. I hope this blog review helps spread the word, even if just a little.'*



## Refugee Tales IV

In this volume there are 14 stories, many detailing the spread of indefinite detention in other countries. Contributions are made by detained people as well as by Shami Chakrabarti, Robert Macfarlane, Bidisha, Rachel Seiffert, Dina Nayeri, Philippe Sands and Christy Lefteri.

These are stories of refugees' experiences of seeking asylum, mostly about young men, shunted around the system, escaping only to be caught again in the endless battle to gain accepted status. Lives are wasted. Time spent studying is wasted. Conditions for living are terrible. Spirits are dashed. Help is well-meaning but often inadequate against the mysteries and convolutions of the legal processes. Each story is distressing in its own way. Each story reveals a small part of the system that makes up the hostile environment.

From the Advocate's Tale:

*"Put yourself in the shoes of those people fleeing their home, seeking refuge here in the United Kingdom, or in neighbouring countries. Once you made it here you would expect to receive some sort of help or protection, right? Well, in my case it was the opposite. My experience in detention was worse than I can describe. (122)"*

...And there are good people doing the right thing: rescuing people from drowning; welcoming refugees on arrival; providing material help; providing advice; and campaigning; collecting stories to share. Refugee Tales, Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and Comma

Press are doing the right thing. Yet here we are: still arguing against indefinite detention; still walking; still talking and telling stories. There's only one thing for it: we must persist. We must work towards making the UK a place where refugees can 'expect to receive some sort of help or protection'.



Caroline with her family in Dartmoor

Also on [bookword.co.uk](http://bookword.co.uk):

*Refugee Tales Edited by David Herd & Anna Pincus (February 2017)*

*Refugee Tales -2 Edited by David Herd & Anna Pincus (March 2018)*

*Refugee Tales III Edited by David Herd & Anna Pincus (June 2020)*



## Thoughts from a New Walker

By Nikki Mendu

I exited the train station with a sense of unease. With COVID restrictions and the constant lockdown shifts and changes, social interactions had become a rather nerve-wracking experience. Coming up the steps, I saw people in blue shirts milling about everywhere. Canterbury seemed to have become Refugee Tales, or vice versa, depending on who you might ask. I greeted familiar faces from a local walking group I had met previously before being guided to join my allotted pink bubble. I stuck on my name tag, pulled on my pink wrist band and joined the sea of blue in pulling on my gifted Refugee Tales shirt. And soon, we were off!

### Conversations in Canterbury

There was a spirit of generosity in the air which I felt early on, and it was catching. People shared food, stories and tiredness

as many people entered their second day of walking. Conversations ebbed and flowed with the pace of the walk and the changing conditions of our path. We travelled around Canterbury in a loop fashion, and I learned much that day. I learned of people's families, travels, languages spoken and talents. I learned about the beginning of the walks and how something that would grow to be so big and keep people coming back, would start so small. An idea among friends, and a shared belief in a cause greater than those people.

There were differences in our community of walkers, and these were important differences to note. These differences were what allowed us to move in and out of worlds and conversations that the day-to-day push for lives lived individually might not allow for. I appreciated the way one could be educated, corrected, prompted to learn and unlearn through a single conversation.

I enjoyed the letter writing and the opportunity it gave us to be drawn back to the shared sense of injustice at a detention system. I felt a part of something, and walking through the streets, lined up in blue, I felt power in our numbers, belief in what we were doing and hope for what might still be possible.

I had a sleepy train ride home, my head buzzing with new names, new faces, and my body finally easing into the rest it had been silently asking for several hours before. Already, I look forward to the next walk and being able to greet familiar faces in another place at another time.

Quote from 'Call Them by Their True Names' by Rebecca Solnit:

*"You do what you can. What you'd done may do more than you can imagine for generations to come. You plant a seed and a tree grows from it; will there be fruit, shade, habitat for birds, more seeds, a forest, wood to build a cradle or a house? You don't know. A tree can live much longer than you. So will an idea, and sometimes the changes that result from accepting that new idea about what is true, or right, just might remake the world."*

## Things Are Different When You're Walking

By Ruby Wright

I attempted to draw while we walked, I even constructed a special belt to hold my materials, but drawing on the move made me travel sick, so instead I drew



while we didn't walk. Walking time was for talking and reflecting and trying to commit images to memory. The things you say and hear are different when you're walking.

Then we'd stop and I'd frantically draw people in the moments they were static. The sweetest thing was having little Hamudi sitting with me, watching as people's faces emerged on my paper, squeaking with recognition and then holding on to my sketchbook, ready to whip it out of my hand the moment I lifted my pencil, rushing off to the person in my drawing to show them their portrait.

It's impossible to capture the heart of a refugee tales walk in a drawing. It would take many walks and conversations and drawings to do that, so these only scratch the surface. But it's been a privilege to attempt it.



## Highlights from the July Walk

*by Andrea Dumbrell*

The shared experience of mud as we navigated our way through the woods. Some cautiously, some fearlessly, and one slipping over but managing to save his phone.

The wonderful wooden snake where we stopped for lunch on our first day and passed by on the second, where I greeted it with excitement as an unexpected friend.

The conversations and stories.

The game of molkky that we played in the evening on the grass, throwing a baton at numbered blocks. Some people were really good at it. I was terrible. This made me laugh. A lot.

Hop fields, Oast houses, flowers, views. An iron age fort. Bridges, streams and a prince's well. Sunshine and rain. Rabbits on the university campus. And steps. So many steps. Physical steps and stairs to notice and to photograph. And walking steps to count. Steps leading in different directions, and for this weekend along different paths. But with the knowledge that others were taking steps too, even if they couldn't be seen.

All in all, a beautiful weekend.



## Impressions of the July Walk

By Ilse

Being able to join the walk in Canterbury for my first Refugee Tales walk was such a privilege. It was amazing to see people who I had previously only met over Zoom, and I really felt the Refugee Tales community. My favourite part was not the beautiful views and orchards, not even the delicious cake, but when someone came up to us to ask what we were walking for and, after people had explained about Refugee Tales and GDWG, wrote down details to get involved. It really was a great experience walking with everybody, and I look forward to walking with you again!



## First Time Walkers

By Lafi and Zabihollah

This year we were so lucky that new walkers were able to join us in Canterbury. It was a strange first-taste of Refugee Tales, walking in pods of 30 and staying in university halls rather than the usual 100+ walking group and nights in church halls and community centres! We

can't wait for all of our new walkers to experience the full Refugee Tales experience next year. Here are some of their reflections on the July weekend:

Zabihollah: My favourite part of the weekend was the walking, and talking with different people. It was nice. When you don't have family here, we come there and meet people who want to help us, so it feels good. Canterbury was a nice place. Walking between the trees and going to a Church. It was about 800 years old. We met one man who explained a little about the Church. One of the people I met, sometimes calls me now. At the beginning I was a little shy because I didn't know the people but slowly we were better friends. My English is not that good, so I tried my best to explain what I was thinking. I'm a good listener so I like people to talk and I listen. We saw rabbits, ducks, and also cows. There was a lot of mud! I hope the next walk is going to be soon.

Lafi: It's very fantastic. It's nice to meet people, walk and share what you are thinking. Sharing the food, sharing the fun. It's nice to meet people who understand you and what has happened to you. All people there talk to you as if they know you for two years! I like this experience. The difficult thing - when I travelled from a long way and I got lost at first. But they waited for me, and I joined them later on. It made me very happy. The people were wonderful, very welcoming. The countryside was very fantastic, when you walk you see everything is beautiful. When you walk with the people, everything is different and when you talk about the place it



makes you feel beautiful in your mind. Thank you to everybody who introduce me and accept me and welcome me.

## **Being a Walking Ambassador for Refugee Tales and GDWG**

*By Temi*

I'd like to thank all of the supporters that have donated to my Justgiving page, it means a lot to me. It's enlightened me that helping people doesn't just have to come from your hand, even speaking out can be helpful.

I decided to raise money for GDWG because I was talking to one of the women at the charity where I volunteer about how I was going for a walk with Refugee Tales. She asked if there was a donation page, so that's why I set one up. I was expecting to raise maybe £100. It was shocking, I'm telling you - it's over £1,000 now! I'm so grateful. I hope that the money is used to support people both in detention and when they are out. I hope that it can put a smile on other people's faces, helping with clothes or food.

From my childhood, I've loved helping people. When I was a child, I remember my grandma had a shop. I was about 8 or 9, and I'd watch the shop for a few minutes for her. Before she'd come back, I was giving out stuff for free! It puts a smile on my face, helping people. It actually gives me confidence that in the future I have an idea of how to help, even if it isn't coming from me directly. Joining Refugee Tales, mentally I've grown and that's something that I'm so grateful for. Everything that we've gone through, now I see my experience

as something I can be proud of. I've managed to overcome a lot. Everyday when I think of you guys I have hope. It's a big new family I can talk to about anything.

If you would like to be a Walking Ambassador please let Josie know in the GDWG office ([josie@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:josie@gdwg.org.uk)) and if you would like to support Temi as a Walking Ambassador, here is the link: <https://justgiving.com/fundraising/temi-refugeetales-walkingambassador>



## **Art Workshops with the Self-Advocacy Group**

During August, we were so fortunate that Steph Turner ran three art workshops in collaboration with Steve Collis and Antonia Bunnin. Steph had already worked with GDWG's self-advocacy group earlier in the year and everyone was keen to have more sessions. We were really delighted to open the opportunity to all of our volunteers and supporters.

The workshops created space for connection and creativity, focusing on a world without detention. It was an opportunity to re-connect after the Refugee Tales summer walk and to engage with the Walking Inquiry.

Here are some thoughts from workshop participants imagining a world without detention:

'When there is no detention, if you have family you can be with your family. If you have a love, you can be with your love. If you have friends, you can be with your friends.'

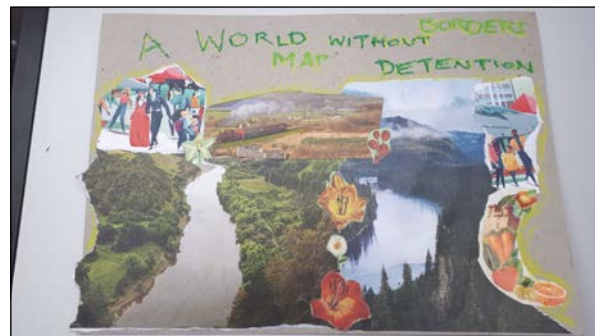
'A world without detention will bring a big smile to people.'

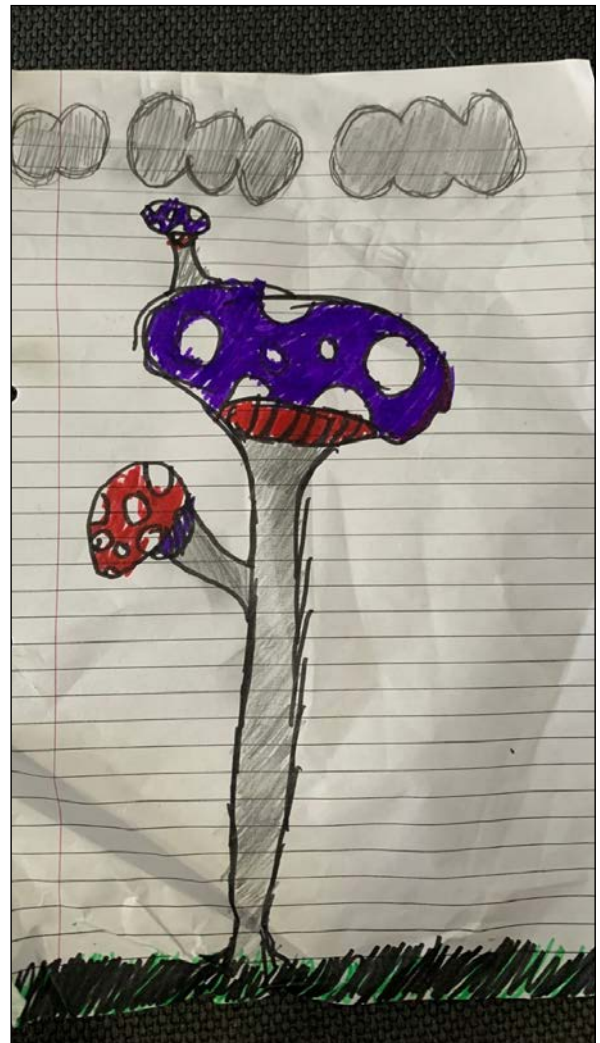
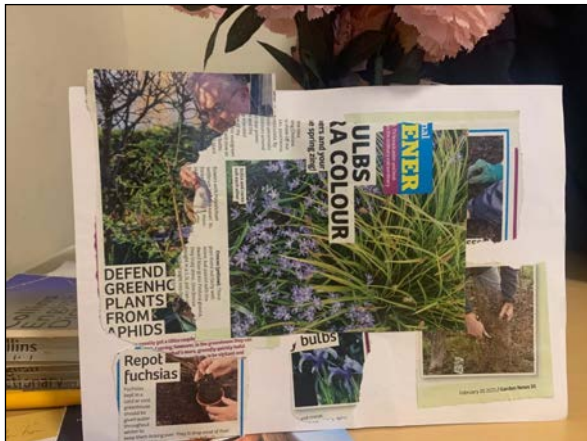
'The first connection is so important. Hopefully a world without detention would make those connections. You can't always say the right things, you can't always have the answers, but if you can show understanding and empathy that must surely go a long way.'

'The freedom that birds have to cross borders is very powerful. Murmurations are very powerful, full of joy. I hope everyone gets the chance to see this freedom.'

'Your heart is your passport. Everyone is welcome in any place.'

"I was thinking about a world without detention and a world map without borders when making this. So I wanted to include positive images, images of nature and the ability to travel across the collage."





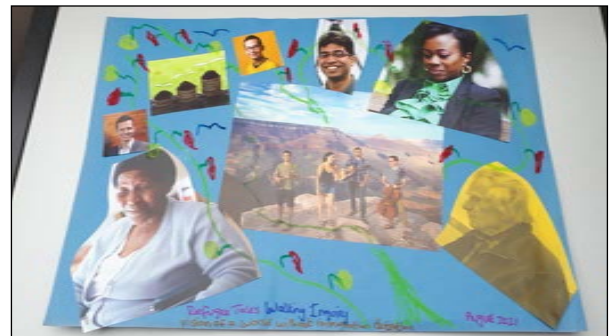




## Visions of a World Without Immigration Detention

### *Three Collages*

"Our connection with nature, and through nature, is a strong theme in all my pictures. I love the image of a group of people making music at the top of a mountain, with not a boundary or a barrier in sight. It is so joyful and evokes freedom. In the third collage, I chose to show lots of different people along the bottom, whilst the top part shows things that we as humans can share, and through sharing we reinforce our common humanity: books, food, friendship, a love of nature and our natural world, medicine, and the gold and blue (made from an old chocolate box and some tissue paper) represents the riches of the world!"



## The Self-Advocacy Group

by Jamie Macpherson

For the past year, the self-advocacy group has been working alongside the Walking Inquiry, looking at the effects of indefinite detention and it has spent the last 6 months working on a project to engage with MPs. The group has had monthly Zoom meetings, listening to people with experience in this area such as Leon Mukazi (Youth Mayor for Crawley) and Laura Moffat (former MP for Crawley). A draft letter has been composed to send to MPs and a power point presentation on our concerns about immigration detention was produced to be used when meeting MPs.

One of the group members (M) wrote to his local MP, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Labour Co-op MP for Kemp Town in Brighton, expressing his concerns on detention and asking for a meeting. Lloyd agreed to a meeting and a Zoom call was arranged for mid-October.

As a Brighton resident and visitor with GDWG, I was asked if I would join M for this meeting.

M and I met over a cup of coffee on Brighton seafront a couple of days beforehand to discuss the format of the meeting. We decided that I would cover the background of GDWG and the Walking Inquiry and that M would speak about his experience of detention. M was able to convey a powerful image of life in detention. He spoke of the experience of inadequate medical care, disturbed sleep and poor food. M said that he witnessed others in Brook House who were suffering from physical and mental health

issues and that were very distressed and frightened by their experience.

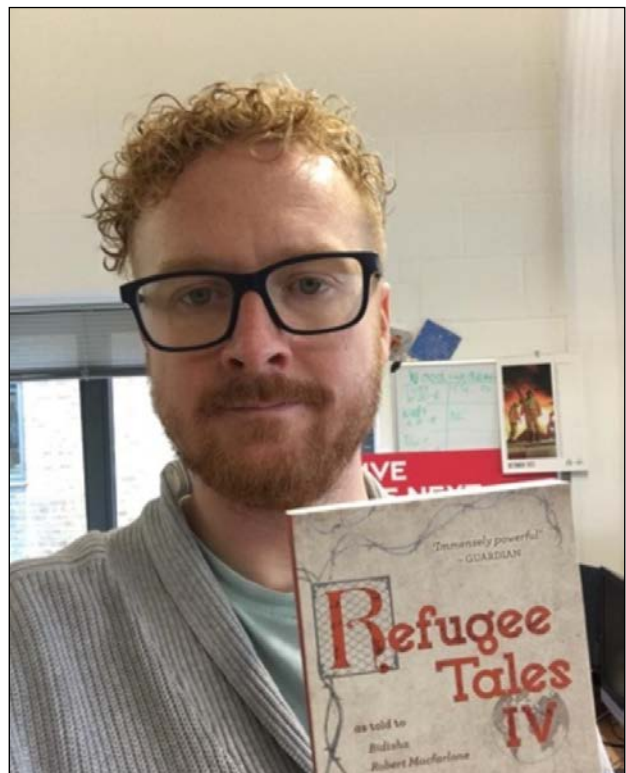
Lloyd listened with interest and he asked a number of questions.

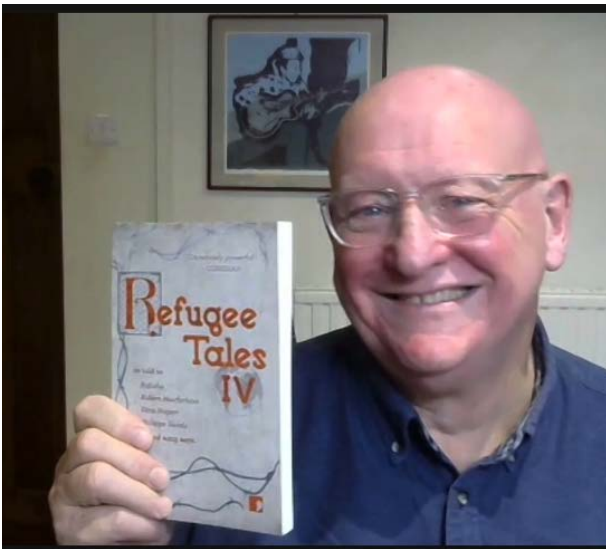
We ended the meeting by asking him if he would agree to have his photo taken holding a copy of the Refugee Tales book, to which he agreed.

Lloyd was also interested in joining a 'Walk with Us' walk and he agreed that we could keep him updated on the Walking Inquiry.

We also asked him if he was a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on immigration detention and he said that he would be interested to join.

M and I came away feeling that it was an engaging meeting and that Lloyd shared many of our concerns on immigration detention. We look forward to meeting him again on a monthly walk and to strengthening the relationship between GDWG and Lloyd.





## Meeting Hywel Williams

*By Eli Barrott and Souleyman Sow*

It was a great pleasure to meet Hywel Williams MP for Arfon who was interested to learn more about Refugee Tales. He had been introduced to our work by Refugee Tales Cymru. Hywel immediately recognised the themes of our work from his own experience of casework for his constituents. He said that in his locality there was a shortage of lawyers specialising in immigration cases and this was a problem. Hywel was keen to join a Refugee Tales walk in the future. We were delighted by the interest he had in the Walking Inquiry and his interest in meeting us to discuss the findings next year.

## My first Refugee Tales Walk

*By Victoria Sturdy*

"How did you hear about the Refugee Walks?" \*\* an opening question as I walked with fifty others one Autumn Sunday. We had gathered outside Christ's Hospital train station on the look out for Josie in a distinctive bright green scarf, when the London train arrived bringing more walkers some wearing blue

'Refugee Tales' tee shirts. Despite being masked, they greeted each other as long lost friends.

I had started walking regularly during the last eighteen months and still felt that wonderful 'green hit' as we entered woodlands, looked across green fields, and appreciated the North Downs' undulations in the distance. This walk was different, it was not so much about reaching a destination but the exchanges and encounters along the way, in fact at times I felt transported to different worlds. I also felt odd about not being in control of where I walked, tried to trust the leaders, and anxious about a small blister on a toe. This was only an eight mile ramble and I wondered whether some with us on that day had previously walked many hundreds more.

We entered Slinfold village where the church welcomed us with refreshments. Muddy boots left outside, we ate our picnics sitting at shared tables,





Mohammed offering round a huge box of delicious home made falafels (recipe in this newsletter). Chatting and listening to travellers' tales was a highlight for me.

Time for the return journey the sun emerged and the pace quickened; or had we become used to navigating muddy stretches, helping each other over stiles, walking and chatting at the same time?

\*\*My reply to the opening question was that through dear Friends at Horsham Quaker Meeting House, I had read the book, felt the outrage and now gone on the walk and perhaps next time I will get the tee shirt.

## **A Letter from Portsmouth**

*By Lia Deyal*

At Friends without Borders - Portsmouth we were inspired by you to have our first 'Refugee Tales' walk on Saturday 3rd July 2021. There were 29 of

us walking. About half the walkers were refugees and asylum seekers and the rest of us from FWB, other refugee organisations in Portsmouth and friends. We met in Portsmouth and took the 3 minute ferry to Gosport where we met the people from the Gosport side. Our walk was led by the FWB Access to Justice volunteer. He is a lecturer of sociology.

We walked around the historical forts - some still in use. The old Haslar Hospital now being turned into luxury flats. The old Haslar IRC - closed since 2015. And we saw the little island forts out to sea - one of them now converted into a hotel. We walked, talked and chatted. We made new friends and met up with people we hadn't seen in a long time. We sat on the old sea wall and had lunch. Not everybody brought lunch with them but it was suggested that people brought just a little bit extra to share which resulted in a feast for all. We certainly hope that is the first walk of many.

We also feel the inspiration to move towards stories or poetry or art. We will have to see how we can make that happen. I will be ordering Refugee tales 4. I've read the first three which are all incredible and I'm looking forward to the fourth. Thanks again for your inspiration.

## **GDWG & Refugee Tales at Small Wonder Festival, Charleston Farmhouse**

*By Marygold Lewis*

I was lucky enough to be able to attend a wonderful event at Charleston Farmhouse on 26th September, featuring a discussion between the broadcaster and



journalist Bidisha, who acted as host and the novelist Rachel Seiffert. Aided by Karen Swirsky, we set up a stand with both Refugee Tales and Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group banners, where we handed out leaflets about the work of GDWG and Refugee Tales. The weather was kind to us, although a slight wind threatened to blow down our banners a couple of times! One of the highlights of the day was talking to such a diverse group of people, both those familiar with the work our charity does (including many familiar faces of volunteers) and new friends, who were interested to learn more about GDWG.

Both Bidisha and Rachel read from tales that were told to them and that are featured in Refugee Tales Volume IV. Rachel spoke movingly about

migration caused by war, genocide, climate change, poverty and other disasters, forcing people to flee their homes. The hostile environment in the UK was also discussed and the way it is used to attempt to deter people from journeying to the UK.

After the talk, both Bidisha and Rachel were available to chat with people and sign copies of the Refugee Tales books, which were being sold at the event by City Books in Brighton/Hove. Karen and I happily distributed our leaflets to various people having cake and tea in the hopes of raising more awareness about the unacceptable situation that so many people find themselves in.





## Drums and screams - Little Amal Arrives in Canterbury

By Mary Barrett

A beautiful autumn day and Butter Market in the centre of Canterbury is packed with excited children carefully carrying home-crafted banners, curious tourists, students, security guards and a good sprinkling of people in blue Refugee Tales T-shirts. Suddenly, there is a long roll of drums, the children scream, a baby cries at the noise and the crowd falls silent. The drums continue and as press photographers dodge through the gate to the cathedral there is another wait; a huge hand appears on the wall of the gatehouse. Little Amal is a little nervous of this big crowd; she comes out very slowly, bending her head and shyly looking around. Once through the gate, she pauses for a second and looks at everyone staring at her, turns and immediately starts walking. Little Amal is walking because she is a refugee and is seeking sanctuary; she needs to move on despite the crowds who would love her to stay.



Our initial contact with this amazing puppet was strangely moving. Many of us had tears in our eyes as Little Amal walked slowly along the crowded streets of Canterbury. The story of a Syrian child on the move, walking from Turkey to England to find her family would usually evoke some interest but only a passing thought, however Little Amal at 3.5 metres tall commands attention. The crowd wants her, to touch them, to see them, to smile at them - however she is wood, plastic and electronics, and manipulated by three people.

What an opportunity it was for Refugee Tales to be a small part of her long journey which has attracted so much publicity. A large number of RT supporters along with many others walked the mile and a half from the centre of Canterbury up to the University of Kent where Little Amal was welcomed once more. That evening, at an event in

the Gulbenkian Theatre, Niamh Cusack was the host, Patience Agbabi, AJ and Bidisha read their moving tales and Little Amal joined them on the stage to receive a huge realistic scaled up copy of Refugee Tales Book IV that was handed to her by a Syrian refugee.

## **Aspiration**

*by Marygold Lewis*

A season turns, a bonfire burns, an oak tree yearns  
Reflecting the years through leaves of tears  
By this we learn to face our fears  
The roots our feet, the sky our sigh as we say goodbye  
Yet all the while, we fix our gaze high, higher  
And with a brave smile we look and see  
Beyond the dying flame of the bonfire

## **Walking Out Loud**

*by Marygold Lewis*

Walking Out Loud

Walk for freedom  
Walk for trust  
Walk for kindness  
Walk with us

Walk for strangers  
Walk for friends  
Walk with dignity  
Until detention ends

Walk for laughter  
Walk for fun  
Walk for the magic  
Walk with everyone

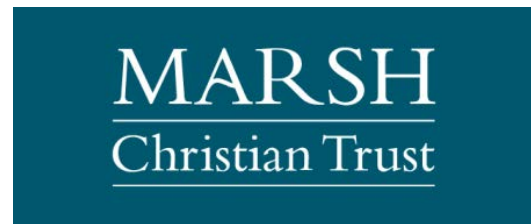
Walk the pavements near and wide  
Walk the paths of the countryside  
Walk until your feet feel sore  
Walk to snow that there's always more

Walk for those people who pace in a cell  
With their stories inside them and no one to tell  
What they have been through, a living hell

Walk in rhythm to the unheard sound  
Of common heartbeats on our common ground  
As we walk for the freedom and walk for the trust  
That we all sorely need  
So please....Walk with us!

We are walking strong  
We are walking proud  
We are walking determined  
We are walking Out Loud

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*The Eleanor Rathbone Charitable Trust*