



SHROPSHIRE SUPPORTS REFUGEES

Charity Number 1196673

ANNUAL REVIEW

2025



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Welcome to Shropshire Supports Refugees' review of the year: 2025



A message from our Trustees

The year has been one of considerable change for us all as we adapt our service to meet changing need and yet stay within financial constraints.

Trustees would like to congratulate and thank staff and volunteers for the hard work that has brought us to the end of the year with: a new vision, a revised strategic plan to achieve that vision, new processes and systems which have improved our efficiency and impact, a new model of working, making our service accessible to far more new arrivals, a greatly enhanced immigration department, new offices and last but not least, a new CEO...or 2 even!

Our founder and first CEO Amanda Jones, left us in April this year. SSR was Amanda's 'baby' to which she gave life with her passion and drive to make the world a better place. Amanda's ability to engage, enthuse and involve brought SSR from one person's idea to a fully constituted charity that has supported thousands seeking sanctuary in Shropshire and Telford. She is now focusing that passion elsewhere and we would like to take this opportunity to thank her wholeheartedly and wish her every success in her new venture. Good Luck Amanda.

We invite you to read and see below, everything we have been involved in this year... we're amazed at the long list!

Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank our funders, partners, staff and volunteers, together you have enabled us to support over 1,000 new arrival community members on their journey to settlement. Thank you.

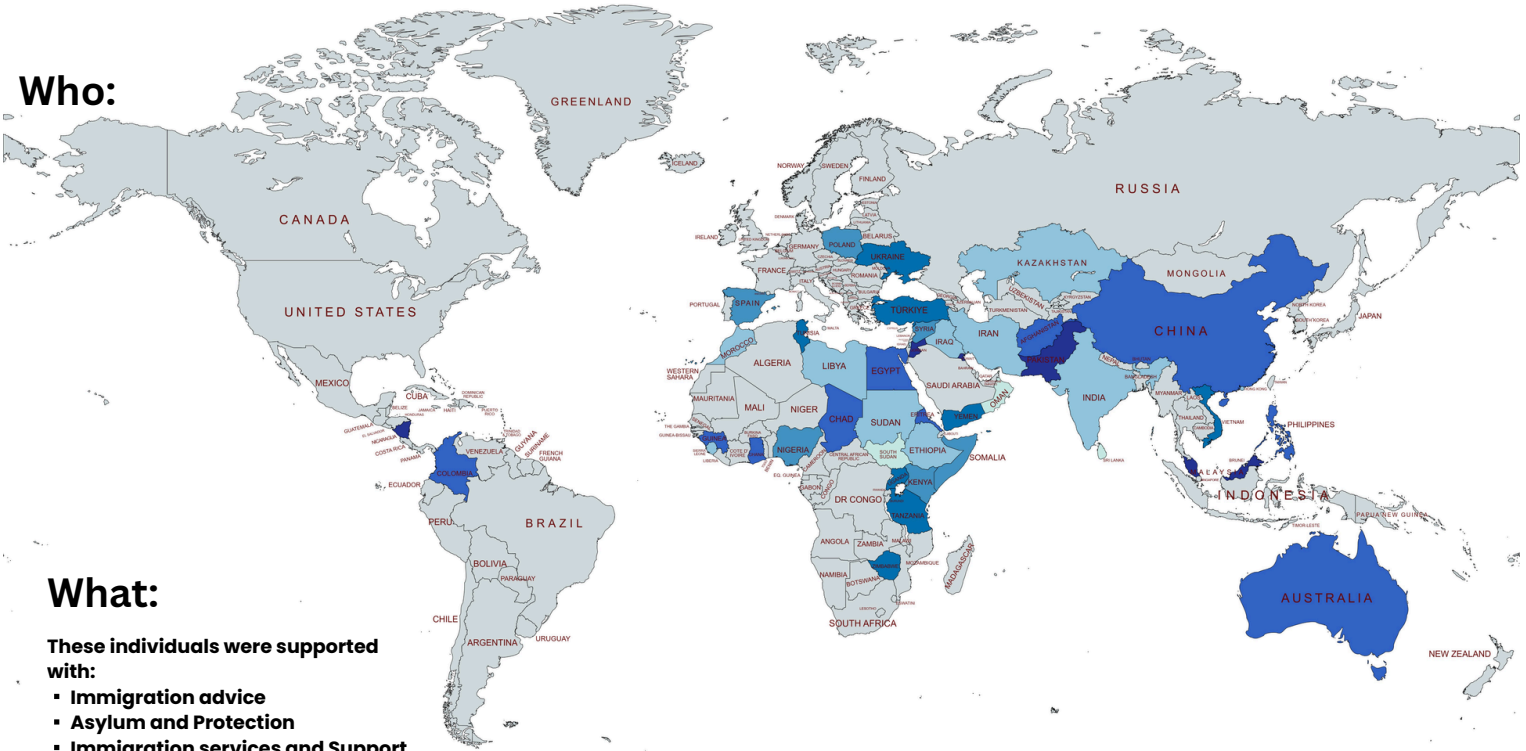
SSR Trustees



Who, What, How?

SSR supported 1,493 individuals from thirty countries who approached our charity with 2,200+ enquiries.

Who:

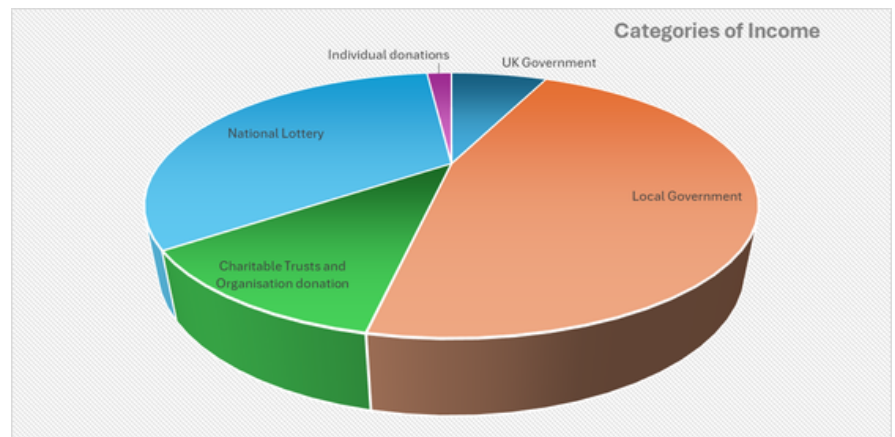


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What:

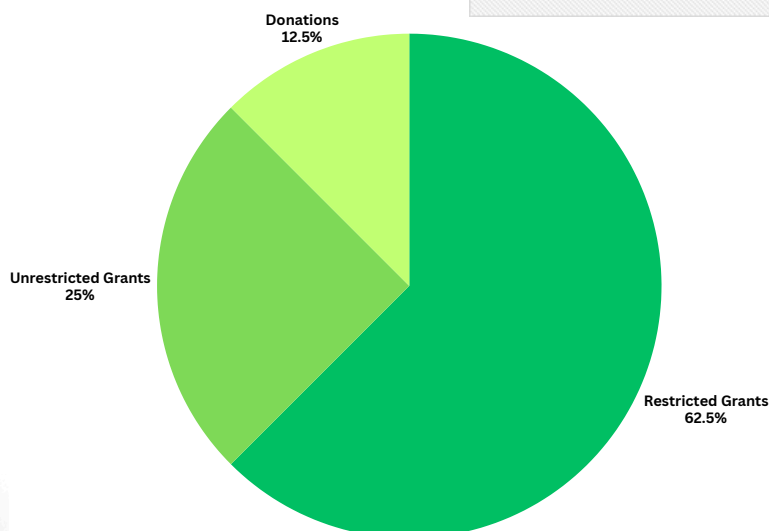
These individuals were supported with:

- Immigration advice
- Asylum and Protection
- Immigration services and Support
- eVisa
- Benefits
- Asylum support
- Bank accounts
- SIM-cards
- Housing and Utilities
- Employment
- Donations and Welfare Support
- Energy advice
- Support with accessing health services (GPs, hospital appointments, etc.)
- English classes
- Education
- General advice and Support
- Sport, Events activities
- Implementation of care plans



How:

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who so generously contributed donations. Your kindness, compassion, and willingness to support our cause truly make a meaningful difference. Grants from Shropshire County Council, The National Lottery, Garfield Weston and many more led to a successful year of fundraising.



A NEW MODEL OF WORKING

Our core delivery



It became apparent earlier this year that the service we were delivering from our hub at Mardol in Shrewsbury was not meeting the needs of some who could benefit from our support, especially Ukrainians situated on the borders of the county and asylum seekers in Telford situated in the hotels and dispersed in the community. This combined with the fact that Shropshire County Council were no longer able to financially support our tenure required a new model of working, more suited to a very rural county and the more urban Telford, where the need for our services is expanding.

After negotiating with partner organisations including Telford Together with Refugees and support groups in Ludlow, Oswestry, Church Stretton and Market Drayton, we put in place an outreach model to border partners every four weeks and to 3 venues in Telford every week. We have recently extended our hours in Telford venues due to high demand, in particular for our immigration advice. We are also on call to anyone in Telford and Shropshire at hours when we are not physically present.

Our work funded by Shropshire County Council to support Afghans in Cosford, Albrighton, Ellesmere, Tern Hill, Bayston Hill and Shrewsbury continues, alongside our drop-in and appointment sessions, four days a week at our new offices in Shrewsbury.

This new model has already doubled the number of people we can support and we expect those numbers to increase further as word of our services spreads.

Diversifying SSR

With generous support from Lloyd's Foundation, SSR trustees are currently working through an action plan to diversify SSR's Trustee Board and its staff team. We plan that more than 50% of trustees will be from service user backgrounds within 6 months and that there will be increasing representation among the staff team as vacancies become available. We have already started the process of encouraging service users to volunteer with us and hope that they will apply when an appropriate role becomes available.



To further ensure that our service is always meeting need we have recently instituted a Client Panel, 12-15 current clients attended the inaugural meeting in November and will meet again in January when a service user will take over the chair role. The panel will have a direct line for reporting to Trustees and Senior Management Team.

Not only do Trustees aim to make the Board more representative of service users, but we are also working to be more reflective of society as a whole.



An update on our Funded Projects

Marches Energy

The Marches Energy Agency commissions SSR to support our clients on: Keeping warm and well at home, understanding energy bills, tariffs and suppliers, insulation and heating grants, energy efficiency measures and understanding the relationship between health and cold homes.

We are grateful for the support we continue to receive from Marches Energy to successfully deliver this project until January 2027.

E-visa

During the year SSR were funded by the Home Office to support individuals to access an online e-visa. We have supported over 500 individuals to achieve this and will continue to provide this service even after the Home Office funding ends.



Sports England

With the aim of improving and protecting their health and wellbeing, a team of wonderful volunteers led by SSR volunteer Chris Child with great support from Pat McCarthy organise a range of sports and leisure activities mainly for young men living in the asylum hotel in Telford and dispersed in Telford.

Football is the most popular activity, with regular sessions for often 20+ men. A Christmas Football Festival at AFC Telford Goalzone brought together around 30 men from different locations. The funding for this is provided by Sport England but will end soon. Efforts are underway to secure future funding and train participants as volunteer football leaders to sustain the provision.

Walking activities continue, though weather-dependent, with good attendance and growing participant confidence and self-reliance. Christmas walks and trips (e.g. to Ironbridge and Attingham) were well received and helped build positive relationships, especially with newer residents and families. Thank you to Pam Hill from Walkers are Welcome for leading much of the activity.



Swimming has been a popular activity but was paused in December while we renegotiate arrangements with Telford & Wrekin Council. Around 125 individuals a month attend these activities.

A massive thank you to Chris and all volunteers who work hard to continue to make this happen.

Shropshire County Council- Leisure & Tourism

Funded by Shropshire County Council- Leisure and Tourism we were able to continue our support of Ukrainian guests in Shropshire.

As part of this project our client Lora Arkhyenko directed and produced yet another moving film 'Children' which many of us had the privilege of viewing at the Old Market Hall in Shrewsbury.

This project also provided:

SSR supported nearly 500 Ukrainian guests and their dependants.



- Ellesmere Story Walk
- Free Football Tickets (Shrewsbury Football Club matches)
- Pantomime (Sleeping Beauty, 90 free tickets)
- Carding Mill Valley Story Walk
- 3 months Free Gym & Swim Membership (200 Vouchers)
- Create & Connect sessions at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery
- Stipertones Story Walk
- Meet Father Christmas at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery
- Behind the Scene Tour at Shropshire Museums' Collection Centre
- Onny Meadows Story Walk
- Creating A Podcast sessions
- Yoga for Ukraine in Shrewsbury (for adults)
- Yoga for Ukraine in Oswestry (for adults)

- Yoga for Ukraine in Shrewsbury (for children)
- Yoga for Ukraine in Shrewsbury (master-class for children)
- Haugmond Hill Story Walk
- Sketchbook Circle at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery
- Ludlow Castle Trip
- Dance for Ukraine (adults)
- Dance for Ukraine (children)
- Severn Valley Railway
- Blists Hill Victorian Town
- Wenlcock Priory Story Walk
- Ukrainian Craft Fair at SM&AG
- Children (film)

Thank you to Shropshire County Council

Our ESOL programme

Employability courses – funded by the National Grid

45 people completed short courses in employability skills or business start-up. In addition, practice on areas such as CV and application writing and interview skills were woven into general English classes throughout the year.

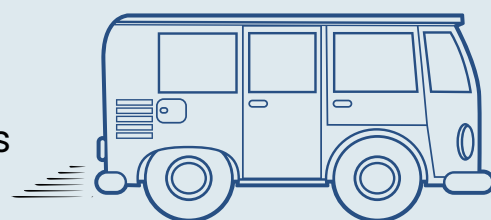


External accreditation – funded by Trinity College London's Language Access Fund

44 learners received certificates from Trinity College London to mark their progress in English. The focus was on those learners with the greatest barriers to learning, the majority being either in the asylum system or from our resettled Afghan cohort.

Informal ESOL – funded by West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership

A project of informal ESOL activities got underway at the end of 2025, including minibus trips to places of interest and improved ESOL provision in two smaller Shropshire towns.



Statements of Comparability – part-funded by the Sackler Trust

SSR enabled 38 people to receive Statements of Comparability from the UK National Information Centre, the official organisation for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills.



Educational advice and support for individuals

We strengthened ties with all local colleges to facilitate adult learners' access to courses. We also had responsibility for securing college places for 16–18 year olds from the resettled Afghan cohort. Individuals were given support with university admissions, such as a student is now studying at Birmingham Conservatoire, and a newly settled refugee applying to return to teaching via a PGCE.

Afghan resettlement project/Shropshire
Shropshire County Council (SCC) fund our support worker Ellie to work with Afghan families who have arrived via the Government funded Afghan Resettlement scheme. They live on Cosford RAF camp, and in a range of towns in Shropshire.

Ellie works with a small team of support workers directly employed by SCC to assist the new arrivals with most aspects of their settlement and integration. Particularly Ellie has worked hard to support the young families to access support with their health but also with creating opportunities for the Afghans to meet with local people. The Afghan women held their own stall at Albrighton Fair, sharing food with locals and chatting with them.

Other activities have included:

- **sessions on appropriate use of all NHS services,**
- **a private rental workshop- finding your own homes, rent, house search etc**

The new arrivals also enjoyed: Willow Weaving at Jackfield, visits to Church Stretton, Acton Scott farm Museum, Oswestry Park Hall Countryside Experience, Chester Zoo, Darwin House, a multi-cultural event by Hay Earthlings, and Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre.



West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) funded project for Hong Kongers

WMSMP funded us to aid the integration of Hong Kongers arriving in Telford and Shropshire under the Government funded British nationals Overseas (BNO- Hong Kongers). As part of this, over 2 consecutive Saturdays in July, we hosted a Hong Kongers 'Food & Craft Fair' at Arleston Community Centre in Wellington. Alongside the fair SSR organised a series of workshops to better inform Hong Kongers on Employment rights, The UK education system, Hate Crime, achieving Indefinite Leave to Remain process and CV writing tips. Nearly 300 Hong Kongers attended, with 90 accessing workshops.....and we had a visit from the Hong Kong Lion who danced for us.



Employability

A growing proportion of SSR's work is focused on optimising the employability of our service users. Our English tuition is a large part of this but it includes everything from support with opening bank accounts, registering online for HMRC accounts, accessing National Insurance numbers, writing CVs, teaching about the UK employment system, job application, preparing for interview etc etc.

We have also accessed courses for clients including: Food Safety L1 H&S in Construction and L2 Award in Food Safety in catering. We also hosted a session on Business Start-Up and self-employment, thanks to Carlos Terol.

This is an area we want to expand and for which we need to access dedicated funding. To this end we have recently been meeting with DWP personnel and hope to be working closer with them in the future.

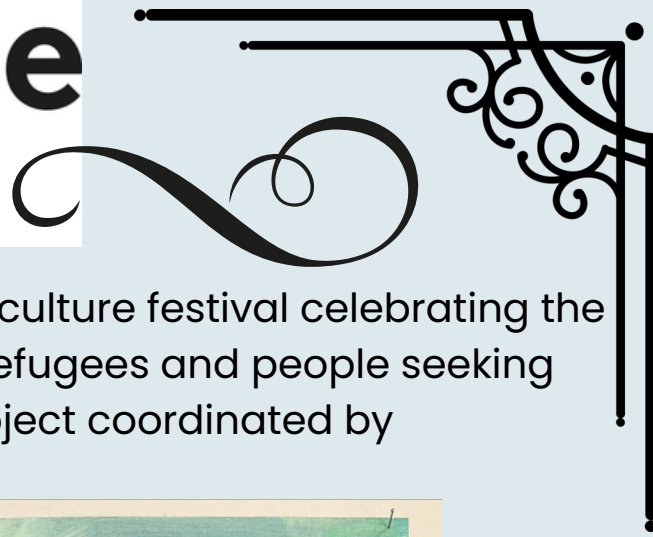
Research into service user's understanding of mental health and neurodiversity

As part of NHS Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin's 'initiative to invite: '...people across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin were asked to share their views about ADHD and autism services' Shropshire Supports Refugees were commissioned to facilitate and report on 4 focus groups which SSR brought together to discuss this topic. The aim was that this report would describe each cohort's thoughts and understanding on the topic and that service providers could, as a result, better understand and cater for individuals from those communities in the context of this topic.

SSR staff worked with around 40 Ukrainians, Afghans and Hong Kongers and as a result were able to make well received recommendations on delivering health projects to these and other refugee cohorts.

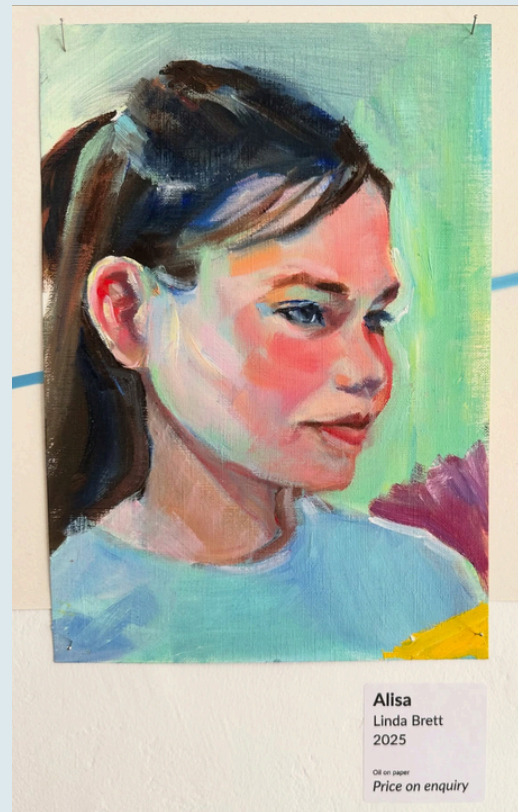


Refugee Week



Refugee Week is the world's largest arts & culture festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. The festival is a partnership project coordinated by Counterpoints Arts.

In partnership with The Gateway Gallery in Shrewsbury refugees created a powerful exploration of what it is to be a refugee, through the medium of art - "Flight"



In 2025 the theme for Refugee Week was "Community as a Superpower."





Our City of Sanctuary membership continue to grow

To date nine schools have been awarded School of Sanctuary status, the most recent being St Mary's CE Primary School in Shawbury and a further six schools are actively working on their portfolios including one in Telford. Over 35 schools have signed the CoS pledge as supporting institutions. Through SSR's work on Schools of Sanctuary to date we have engaged with approximately 4000 primary aged pupils and 1200 secondary aged pupils and worked with senior staff across all eight schools.

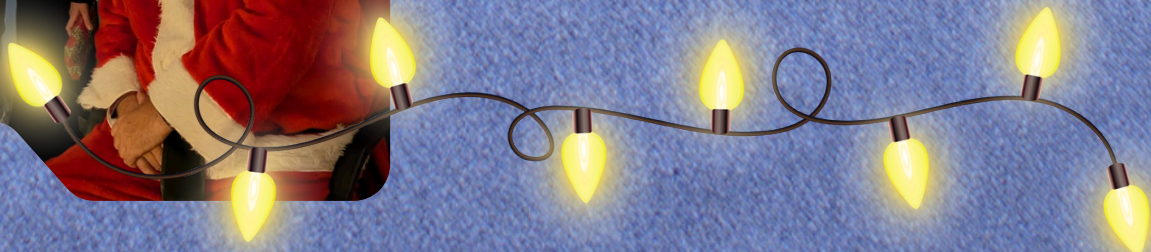
We have also engaged with two Multi Academy Trusts - Empower Trust in Shropshire and the Learning Community Trust (LCT) in Telford and Wrekin. The CEO of Empower Trust has indicated that she would like all schools in that Trust (eight schools in total) to achieve the award and the LCT is engaging with its schools about the award and how it can support EDI. This could potentially mean a further 15 schools come forward for the award.

The benefits of the award are self-evident. It recognises a schools commitment to creating a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment where every child and family feels valued and supported.





To end our year on a high,
Father Christmas was able to fit
in a visit to SSR where he met 39
children and their parents. Each
child took part in Christmas
based craft activities and left
with a present from Santa due
to the kind generosity of The
Samaritans, The Hive, Tesco, St
Peters Church and many other
friends



VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers have proved invaluable in helping support independence and local integration in the wider community- this includes helping with medical appointments, attending local events as well as just being a point of contact in the community.



Our volunteers time and commitment have helped the charity save over £18,000 this year - helping with medical appointments, ESOL support, transport, donation pick up, events and activities.



Alison: As an immigrant myself, I understand how scary it can be to move to a new place where you don't know anyone. It's also stressful when you have to learn new customs and, in the case of many, a new language. Sometimes, the locals aren't the most friendly or patient with you, and that can really make a tough situation worse. I applied to volunteer because I saw the people we help as neighbours, and some of them actually are my neighbours! If there was a way to help folks to feel more welcomed in our community, I had to be a part of that! Helping people allows us to see a bit of ourselves in others, and it's this shared humanity that makes us better people.

*Thank
you*

'Farzana's' story: 2023- 2025

As a young girl in Afghanistan, Farzana dreamed of becoming a doctor and working in her family's clinic. She was a bright child but with the Taliban living right next door to her family home, Farzana knew that her dream was not a realistic future. After the fall of Kabul in 2021, Farzana's family had to go into hiding and the family applied for the Afghan Relocation Assistance Program through the UK government. Farzana was forced to give up her education under Taliban rule. Finally, in September 2023 the family arrived safely in the UK. Farzana's new life began in a military camp in the south of England. Here, she began to learn English for the first time. Her desire to become a Doctor was once again reignited as she realised that education for females in the UK was encouraged, not punished.

In December 2023, Farzana and her family were relocated to the county of Shropshire and introduced to the Shropshire Supports Refugees (SSR). This introduction opened up a whole new realm of possibilities for Farzana, who was desperate to enrol in school and begin her formal education again. SSR was able to support Farzana into college, supporting her to pass her enrolment exam for ESOL. Additionally, the ESOL coordinator of SSR encouraged Farzana to plan ahead and also consider taking Mathematics. Farzana successfully passed both these courses in the Summer of 2025, highlighting her dedication to learn. With Farzana's mind now focused on the next steps required to reach her goal, the ESOL coordinator found Farzana a dedicated SSR volunteer, who visited her home once a week specifically to practice and learn medical terminology.

Further to education and ESOL support, Farzana's family also received other support from SSR. This included donations of basic essentials (shoes, coats, cooking pans), support to understand the NHS and attend medical appointments, support with housing issues and benefits, converting their Biometric Residence Permits into eVisas and applying for their provisional driving licences. Due to Farzana's excellent progress in her English understanding and her ability to adapt to UK life, she often interpreted for the rest of her family and regularly took the lead on household issues. SSR nurtured this confidence and encouraged her to take the lead on family matters – contrary to what would be expected of her in her home country. As a result of Farzana's exceptional understanding and continuous learning of UK systems and processes, SSR gave her the opportunity to volunteer, supporting other Afghan families in understanding UK life.

Farzana is now an active member of the SSR's Client Panel, engaging with SSR's Trustees to support the improvement and development of the charity. Additionally, she is working part-time for SSR as an ad hoc community interpreter to bring financial support to her family and has successfully secured herself places on 3 further education courses including Level 1 Health and Social Care. Another fantastic step towards achieving her ultimate ambition.

Farzana is constantly looking at ways to improve her prospects, bring security to her family and achieve her aspirations. Her next objective is to complete a community interpreters' course to become a qualified Pashto and Dari interpreter, allowing her to work alongside her studies. SSR will continue to support her to find the right course in addition to providing her further opportunities for work experience and volunteering. At only 17 years old Farzana has shown tremendous resilience, motivation, intelligence and resourcefulness and with the support and commitment of SSR she is well on the way to fulfilling her dream of becoming a Doctor, something that at one point in her life seemed impossible.



'Ali's story 2022-2025

Ali is from Afghanistan, feeling unsafe under the new Taliban regime, he left Afghanistan. He had a traumatic journey to the UK, sustaining an injury to his head at the hands of the Eastern European authorities. He travelled from mainland Europe into the UK to seek sanctuary. He arrived at the Lion Hotel in Shrewsbury as a person seeking asylum in November 2022.

SSR supported Ali through the asylum process we: provided basic essentials, clothing, shoes, toiletries, English lessons, activities, general advice and guidance, linked him with the local Muslim community via a mosque, engaged him with our EID celebrations, supported him with his passion of boxing, introduced him to boxing classes, bought appropriate shoes for him and donated a cycle to enable him to get to training sessions.

With further support from SSR Ali gained refugee status in Autumn 2023.

Again SSR supported Ali –

- with his move on process, including Universal Credit, opening a Bank account, Homelessness application, links with employment support services.
- by accompanying him to appointments and with correspondence to the Housing Team and facilitated interpreting.
- by networking within the community to find a host family who could provide a room for him to rent.
- to link with the Local Authority to support with upfront costs of deposit and first month's rent.
- by supporting the host family, we helped with introductions and teaching the family how to use google translate.
- by providing household items such as bedding and kitchen ware.
- by converting his BRP card to eVisa and then supported to correct eVisa when an error occurred.
- By helping him to navigate Universal credit and job seek. Once he found suitable employment we supported him through the interview and on-boarding process (share code and permission to work. We helped him understand pay-slips, contracts, holiday, sick leave, NINO, tax etc.

At this time Ali's health was not good, he found it difficult mentally to cope with his health issues that had been exacerbated over the time of his asylum/refugee journey. SSR supported him with GP appointments, attending specific clinics and referrals. We supported him to navigate UC health assessments from health questionnaires to capability to work assessments (booking interpreters, giving advice as to location and support to attend.

Ali wanted to remain in Shrewsbury, where he has built of network of support, friendship and a sense of community and belonging. He has now successfully found his own accommodation through the support of friends he has made. His mental health has improved and he is now returning the support he received from SSR and the community by offering his guidance, knowledge and friendship to a new family who has arrived in the area.



Our Co-CEOs



The landscape of SSR as we reach the end of 2025 looks quite different from the one we stepped into at the start of the year.

As an organisation, we have faced complex decisions that will shape how SSR operates in 2026 and beyond. Our founder and CEO, Amanda, moved on to pursue new endeavours. We transitioned from a multi room hub to smaller offices – a deliberate sacrifice to ensure our service delivery remained strong. We took our wrap around support out into the community, becoming more accessible to those who may need us most. Our immigration service evolved into a more formalised offering, and we are now building a dedicated team equipped to support our most vulnerable clients.

On a personal level, I saw the strength of our team shine through. Their ability to adapt, stay focused, and maintain high standards of care in the face of so much change has been remarkable.

As we enter 2026, I will once again take on a new role – stepping into the position of co-CEO of SSR. With a focus on finance, operations, and governance, I am committed to supporting SSR as it continues to grow from strength to strength.

With kindness, compassion, and respect, at the forefront of our work there is nothing we cannot achieve.

Emma

I look back on 2025 with deep respect for the people we support and appreciation for everyone who makes Shropshire Supports Refugees the organisation it is today. Although I stepped into the role of co-CEO in January 2026, I held the post of Project Manager in 2025, working closely with colleagues, volunteers, and trustees.

It was a challenging year for many displaced people across Shropshire, who continued to face uncertainty, hardship, and isolation. Their resilience and the compassion of those who stand alongside them have amazed me time and again. I saw firsthand how vital practical support, reliable information and simple human connection were.

I am incredibly grateful for the dedication of our volunteers, staff, trustees, and partners. I have led a number of incredible projects that have made a significant difference in people's lives. Behind the scenes, we strengthened our internal processes and partnerships, ensuring we remain responsive and sustainable for the future.

As I move forward as co-CEO (Projects & Development), I'm proud of what was achieved in 2025 and thankful to everyone who made it possible.

Stanislav



And finally...A heartfelt 'Thank you' to you all.

None of this could happen without our funders to whom we are truly grateful, including:

Shropshire County Council

National Lottery

Sports England

Marches Energy

West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership

Garfield Weston Foundation

Telford & Wrekin Councillor's Pride Fund- Cllr. Arnold England

Ford

Matrix

Trinity College

Those who make regular donations via: People's Fundraising or otherwise

Those who make one off donations