

# AUTUMN NEWS

Our volunteer run organisation provides friendship and assistance to Asylum Seekers, Refugees and non EEC migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

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WTRRP.ORG.UK



## HOW DO YOU LIVE ON £36.95 A WEEK?

**It's a question that our clients seeking to remain in the UK grapple with every day. Those applying to remain here are not permitted to work while waiting for the outcome of their application. Those who have savings must live off them and those who are destitute are entitled to support with housing and an allowance of just £36.95 per person per week.**

This works out at £1,921.40 a year – slightly more than 50% of the jobseeker's allowance. This amount is intended to cover everything except housing and utility bills, which means food, washing detergents, bedding, transport, clothing, toiletries and all 'extras', from a TV licence through an internet connection and phone calls to family back home.

So our clients rely on assistance from the food bank (see our Summer newsletter for a feature on WTRRP's role in preparing weekly food parcels) or heavily discounted food, second hand clothes, toys, books and other items donated from charities.

### Could you live on £36.95 a week?

*Adapted from article entitled 'How do you live on £36.95 a week? Asylum seekers on surviving on their allowance' published on theguardian.com on 21 August 2017.*

## THINKING OF YOU .....

While there are many different reasons for sending cards, receiving one through the post always brightens your day! Birthdays are particularly special as a child, and receiving a card with your name on the envelope is an essential part of what is, for most, a magical day.

One of our volunteers, Lorna Messenger, plays a truly important role for WTRRP; sending birthday cards to all children aged 18 or under from client families. These cards, along with other congratulatory cards such as on the arrival of a new baby, make a huge difference given that often, the only other items of post our clients receive are official letters.

*Thank you to Lorna for quietly making such a meaningful contribution to our clients lives.*

A home or business collecting box is an easy way to help raise money for WTRRP. Your small change can make a real difference to our work.

Put your loose change to good use by ordering your collection box from Etta and John Lazarus our WTRRP volunteers who supervise the scheme. Contact them by phone or email.

email [john.etta@btinternet.com](mailto:john.etta@btinternet.com)  
phone 01923 824607



# WTRRP ENGLISH LEARNERS CLUB!

## ● The Background

Before 2012 the priorities of the charity were to assist clients with their immigration status and offer befrienders. As the most important elements in determining immigration status were the clients' financial situation and their access to Public Funds, attending English lessons was not always their top priority. However, some knowledge of spoken and written English is necessary for the application, and offering education and training has always been part of the WTRRP ethos.

So a start was made and a few mothers, sometimes with their babies, began to gather in the house of one client. It was friendly, comfortable and chatty (with all conversation in English) with no formal assessment and no end of term test! Sometimes Watford Library was used as a venue, which gave access to a variety of English language course books.

## ● Current day

A few members of that original group still attend today, but having significantly improved their skills, some now act as befrienders to new clients.

New clients were, and continue to be referred by health visitors, children's centres, GPs in housing estates, local churches and existing students.

Following Fr. David Stevenson's generous offer to use St John's Church as a venue for both drop-in consultations and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, the number and size of classes increased. An internationally experienced ESOL teacher joined the charity and

awareness of the classes grew.

The students are now not just mothers with small children, but also single men and women. Students' first languages include Farsi, Turkish, Twi, Shona, Albanian, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu and Arabic. Their ambitions vary too; some want enough English to obtain a job, some to fill in forms for regularising their 'status', some to help their children prepare for school and others who just want to improve their ability to be understood.

A large proportion of students are asylum seekers, awaiting a decision from the Home Office on their right to remain in the UK. Until that decision is reached, which can take years, most do not have permission to work or study and often live in fear of being deported. WTRRP classes offer them the opportunity to use their time profitably, improve their command of the English language, learn the culture of their adoptive country and meet others facing the same life challenges. One student recently commented that having improved their confidence with the English language has helped them feel more confident in other areas of life.

We now hold four different classes that meet in different parts of St John's Church twice a week, with home tuition offered to those who cannot attend classes at the church:

- **A beginners' class**
- **A pre-intermediate class**
- **A literacy class** for those who speak English, but have weak reading and writing skills. Tuition is on a one-to-one basis for this intensive class
- **An advanced class** - our best-attended with 15 students

## ● Looking to the future

ESOL provision, like the charity itself, has grown considerably in the past five years and will continue to expand in order to meet the needs of clients. Eventually, we hope to expand the range of classes offered, adding basic IT and numeracy tuition to further equip clients for employment.

The immigration process is a long journey, paved with hopes, frustrations, and too often, disappointments. WTRRP tutors are glad to offer their small contribution and help make present and future lives feel a little less uncertain.

**Andrea, ESOL tutor**



From left to right: Andrea Hudson, Marie-Jo Churchill, Christine Lowe

# WTRRP DROP-IN CENTRE

## Helping our clients navigate a confusing system

● *She came to the drop-in centre having made her application for permission to remain in the UK, but had not heard anything for several months. Confused and unsure - was there anyone who could help?*

● *He came to the drop-in centre shortly after being made homeless. His English was limited, he had no one to go to. Sad, lonely and dispirited - was there anyone who could help?*

● *She came to the drop-in centre worried about her accommodation and finances. Her family were growing up and they were struggling to live in one room - was there anyone who could help?*

These are just a few examples of queries our volunteers deal with. Clients often arrive confused, powerless, sad and lonely. So what are they looking for? Often, some help with navigating through a confusing system. Whether their problem relates to immigration, housing, benefits or something else, clients may need assistance with completing a complicated form or need a volunteer to make a phone call on their behalf.

And as much as anything they want someone to listen to them. Someone who values them as they are, doesn't judge them and will stand by them through these difficult times.

Over the last 6 months, 120 such interviews have taken place and our clients are always so grateful for the help that is given; 'Thank you so much' and 'God bless you' words frequently heard

at the centre. Our volunteers want to help and will often go the extra mile, accompanying a client to a meeting when they have encountered another barrier further down the line for example.

Following this first contact at the drop-in centre, clients may be allocated a befriender who will provide ongoing support, invited to join WTRRP's ESOL classes if they would like help with their English, or added to the list of clients provided with food and essentials from the food bank.

One significant development to take place in the last few weeks has been the attendance of an immigration expert from Watford's JKC lawyers. Coming to the centre twice a month, he provides invaluable advice to those who struggle with the immigration and asylum system.

***The drop-in centre is open on Tuesdays and Fridays between 11am and 1pm at St John's Church Hall on Estcourt Road. If you are interested in joining the team, please do get in touch - there is a chance you could help change someone's life.***

***Paul and Ruth, drop-in centre coordinators***

Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Project  
**DROP-IN CENTRE**  
At St John's Church  
**OPEN NOW**  
WE PROVIDE ADVICE & MATERIAL HELP TO NON-EEC IMMIGRANTS  
• We can refer you to legal advice & specialist help  
• We can help you with food & housing  
Please come in for a chat & refreshments  
(you will find us through the open doors on the other side of the church)  
or call - 01923 252 434  
[www.wtrrp.org](http://www.wtrrp.org)

## BOATS, PLANES AND BALL GAMES: SUMMER TEEN TRIPS, WTRRP STYLE

WTRRP volunteers organised three outings this August for teenagers. As our families are staying with us longer, children are growing up and becoming teenagers. We are keen to provide them with opportunities to develop friendships with other young people and enjoy fun days out during the long summer holidays.

### ● Girls' canal trip

On the 5th of August, we took twelve teenage girls from WTRRP client families on a canal boat trip from Batchworth Lock to Stockers Lock and back.

Most of the girls were collected from Watford and dropped at the boat along with a picnic lunch for later in the trip. We set off in glorious sunshine, skippered by a crew of two volunteers from the Rickmansworth Waterways Trust. We decorated the boat with bunting and played some great music ...fairly loudly!

The girls took lots of photos, decorated each other's nails and really enjoyed designing tote bags. They were keen to jump off the boat and help at the locks – which was great on the way out but after lunch, it poured with rain and only one brave soul donned her cagoule!

### ● Boys' trip to Royal Air Force Museum

A group of teenage boys was treated to a trip to the RAF museum in Hendon on the 19th. All the boys found something to enjoy whether it was examining the aircraft in detail or the gift shop sweets!

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# SUPPORTERS, HOW YOU CAN GIVE & MORE

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Following a lovely lunch, the minibus stopped at a park on the way back so the boys could have a game of football.

## ● Ball games in Cassiobury Park

The final teenagers' trip of the summer came on the 31st of August, when several volunteers supervised a trip to Cassiobury Park for all WTRRP teenagers plus younger siblings and parents.

Some parents stayed but most took the opportunity to enjoy a walk in the park. After a rain shower the sun came out and it turned into a gorgeous afternoon. The group played football, rounders and badminton, with an archery set going down particularly well! Light refreshments were served sitting on picnic blankets under the trees, and as it was one of the boys' 11th birthday, we celebrated with a cake and candles.

Chatting to the young people during the outings, we heard lots of great ideas for future outings, including trips to the cinema, trampolining, swimming, dancing, and days out at famous historical sites. Here's to many more fun and inclusive events!

**Nikki, volunteer**



Girls' canal trip

## THE FAMILY PARTY – OUR BIGGEST SOCIAL EVENT OF THE YEAR

The family party has been growing steadily in popularity and size each year, and this year, neither wet weather nor heavy traffic (a result of a poorly-timed Watford FC game) could keep clients and their families away from St Mary's Church.

A total of 96 clients (60 of whom were children) and 25 volunteers came together on Saturday the 16th of September for an afternoon of games, music, food and laughter, making this year's party our biggest yet.

Children enjoyed playing traditional party games with volunteers, while adults took the opportunity to get reacquainted with old friends and make new ones over tea and coffee.

As is now customary with our family parties, the food, contributed by clients, volunteers and Watford's We Care Soup Kitchen, was a real highlight.

Thanks to all volunteers who helped make this year's event a huge success!

**Mel and Shilpa, party organisers**



## THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FUNDRAISER

On the 30th of July I was very proud to be part of a fundraising gig called 'The Sky's the Limit' at The Horns - one of Watford's best live music venues. The goal was to put on a great night of music to raise money for, and awareness of, WTRRP and a local children's charity called Playskill.

Three fantastic acts played on the night. First we had beautiful solo songs from acoustic guitarist J.P. Nyman, and then something completely different: super-loud, fast and heavy rock from skilful teenage band Slot Luck. Then Mee and The Band ended the night on a high, with unusual and beautiful electronic music.

Thank you to all the musicians and volunteers who supported the event, one which we hope to repeat soon!

**Daniel, volunteer**



Family Party volunteers

PLEASE SUPPORT US - to make a secure online donation visit [www.wtrrp.org.uk/donations](http://www.wtrrp.org.uk/donations)