



FRS NEWS

Supporting People

January
2023

A jam-packed year for FRS

Furness Refugee Support Group was set up back in 2015 with the aim of helping refugees in camps abroad, as well as those settled locally. Since then, our group has expanded and we now support Ukrainian guests, asylum seekers and resettled families. From parties to English classes, museum trips to coffee sessions, 2022 was our busiest year yet...

A Week in the Life

Throughout the year, our volunteers organise plenty of exciting events for our groups and people in the local community. Alongside that, we're occupied from day to day with various projects that we're involved in.

In an average week, you can find our hardworking members running English classes for asylum seekers – something that's vital to help them adapt to life in the UK – and arranging regular 'coffee and chat' sessions where the guys can relax, play games and socialise.

That's not to mention the other activities we're involved with, from regular meetings for our Ukrainian friends in Ulverston to finding clothing and other necessities for those who arrive in England and refugee camps with next to nothing. We also enjoy spending time with the resettled families in the area, often drinking a cup of tea and helping them with anything they need to integrate into the local community.

Saying that we're a busy bunch would be an understatement!



Some of our regular volunteers who run English classes for the asylum seekers every week.



Some of our resettled Syrian and Afghan families enjoying a day out at Windermere Jetty Museum.

Jettying Off

In the last year, FRS has established a number of successful partnerships with local businesses and organisations who have been very generous in supporting our work.

One of these was Windermere Jetty Museum, who contacted FRS last summer to offer free visits for the groups that we work with. Between June and October, we took three trips to the museum, one with resettled Syrian and Afghan families, one with Ukrainian guests and another with asylum seekers.

The journey up to the Jetty Museum took us on a lovely tour into the Lakes – our friends all appreciated the views as they drove up to Windermere. The museum itself is full of historic boats and plenty of interesting information about the history of the lake and the people who worked on and around it. It was fascinating to wander through the boathouses, see some of the vessels and learn about the conservation that's being done there.

One of the highlights of a visit to the Jetty Museum is undoubtedly a Heritage boat trip – a cruise on Windermere in one of the restored boats. We booked these trips each time we visited the museum, and everyone loved the chance to get out on the lake and soak in some of the history from one of the knowledgeable tour guides. Even the rainy weather during our October visit wasn't enough to dampen our enthusiasm for the experience!

The Jetty Museum was generous enough to give us a room to use as a base during our visit, and the staff were really welcoming and kept us well supplied with tea and coffee throughout the day. We'd like to send another big thank you to the museum for their kindness in inviting us for a trip.

All three of our days out in Windermere were fantastic and thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who came along!

Celebrating with Ukraine

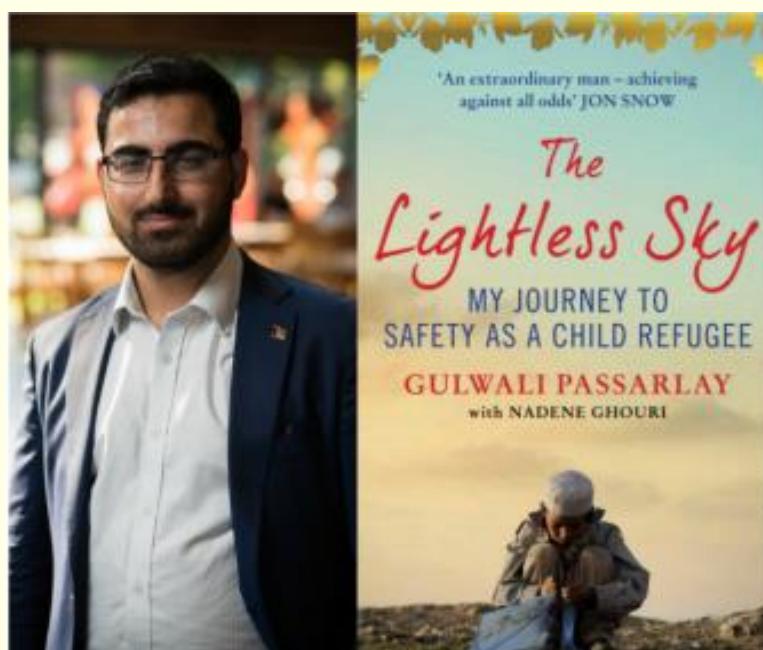
Since arriving in the UK last year, our Ukrainian friends have been proud to share their traditions and heritage with their host families and locals. We've been particularly pleased to work with other volunteers to organise celebrations to mark special days in the Ukrainian calendar.

In August we held a party for the Independence Day of Ukraine in Ford Park. Our Ukrainian friends brought some delicious traditional food with them, including cottage cheese cakes, dumplings and filled roast potatoes. The celebration was topped off with great children's activities, music and singing.

Christmas in Ukraine is observed on 7th January, so we recently held a wonderful Christmas party in Ulverston to celebrate. Our guests came from as far away as Coniston and Grange, and the afternoon was filled with lovely festive food, Ukrainian carols and readings, and plenty of conversation and laughter. Sharing these celebrations with our Ukrainian friends has been a real joy.



Left: A group of our Ukrainian friends celebrating their Independence Day at Ford Park in Ulverston. Above: Ukrainian music at the Christmas party.



Author and campaigner, Gulwali Passarlay, and the cover of his book *The Lightless Sky*,

A Visit from Gulwali Passarlay

In October 2022, FRS was honoured to welcome Gulwali Passarlay to give a talk about his experiences, first at a local school and then later at the Salvation Army in Barrow.

Gulwali had to leave Afghanistan when he was just 12 years old and made the difficult and dangerous journey to the UK, where he was finally reunited with his brother. He's now a tireless campaigner for refugee rights, founder of the group My Bright Kite, an organisation to support young refugees, and a trustee of Refugee Support Europe.

This charity is one that aims to give refugees the chance to be treated with respect, operating Dignity Centres in Cyprus and Moldova.

It was incredibly moving to hear about Gulwali's experience arriving in the UK as a child and the challenges and triumphs he's encountered since then. His passionate work advocating for refugees and raising awareness about their situations was an inspiration for many of us. After his talk, FRS decided to donate some money to Refugee Support Europe in recognition of the vital work that it does in helping refugees to live with respect and care.

If you'd like to learn more about his life, his autobiography *The Lightless Sky* is a brilliant read. It paints a vivid picture of the horrors he faced, the obstacles he overcame and the friends that he's made on the way.

Hit the Hoad, Jack

Many of our volunteers live in Ulverston and the asylum seekers we work with have heard a lot about the town from us, so there was plenty of interest in a trip there just before Christmas. Organised by one of our volunteers, the guys arrived by train and enjoyed a tour of some of Ulverston's favourite sights.

We were lucky to have the support of some local businesses and organisations during the day out. At the Laurel and Hardy Museum we watched some classic film clips and tried on some trademark bowler hats. Of course, no trip to Ulverston would be complete without a stop at Gillam's for tea and scones, and the visit was crowned by a walk up the Hoad, enjoyed by everyone!



A wintery walk up the Hoad completed a lovely day out in Ulverston!

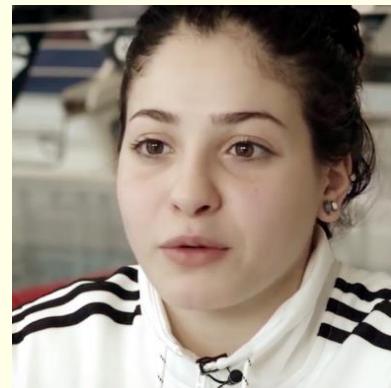
FRS Recommends

Want to know more about what life is like for refugees and how you can help, but not sure where to start? In each edition of our newsletter, FRS will recommend a book, film, show or podcast that you can dive right into.

This month, we're recommending the film *The Swimmers* (available on Netflix) and *Butterfly* by Yusra Mardini (available for free from Cumbria Libraries).

If you cast your mind back to the 2016 Olympics, you might remember the splash made by the Refugee Olympic Team and their star, a Syrian refugee called Yusra Mardini. *Butterfly* is the powerful book that tells Yusra's story in her own words, while *The Swimmers* is an incredibly poignant film based on Yusra's escape from Syria with her sister.

Yusra's story will take you from the streets of Damascus to the freezing and deadly Aegean Sea – which Yusra and her sister, Sara, spent



Yusra Mardini, the Olympian whose story is told in *The Swimmers* and *Butterfly*.
Image credit: United Nations (via YouTube).

hours in to help the boat they were travelling in stay afloat – to refuge in Berlin and eventually to stepping onto the world stage in Rio de Janeiro. The book and film will give you a real insight into how difficult it is for people choosing to flee their home, the terrible dangers they face on their road to safety and the challenges they encounter when their physical journey ends. More than that, you won't fail to be touched by the sisters' endurance, hope and humanity.

Dates for Your Diary

Furness Refugee Support meets monthly to discuss our plans and projects. If you'd like to come along to find out more about our work, you can attend our next meetings:

Monday 13th February, 7pm
Salvation Army in Barrow

Monday 6th March, 7pm
Ulverston Methodist Church

Monday 27th March, 7pm
Salvation Army in Barrow



One of our volunteers, Linda, at our FRS stall in Ulverston during Refugee Week in June 2022.

Get Involved

We're a really welcoming group, and we'd love more people to get involved in FRS. As we continue to provide support and activities for increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, there's always something that you can do to help!

You might be available to help people practise their English – either in a class or in smaller groups – drive people to their appointments, accompany us on the trips that we take to various places in Cumbria, or just be a friend. The opportunities are endless!

Fundraising is also a great way to support our work. Some of the groups and individuals who have raised money for us with events and concerts in the last year include Art Space, Anthony John Clarke, Churches Together on Walney and South Lakes Rock School Choir. We've also been grateful to the many supporters who've continued to donate to FRS, even when times are tough.

If you'd like to get involved or learn more about our work, you can email us at furnessrefugees@gmail.com or join us in our Facebook group, [Furness Refugee Support Volunteers](#). Everyone is welcome!