



# **EDINBURGH'S COMMUNITY STORIES**



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* EDINBURGH

**To celebrate Refugee Week we've brought together the stories of volunteers, researchers and refugees themselves, from the University and the wider community of Edinburgh.**

The stories are told by each individual in their own words, so that you can hear their voices, their passions, their struggles and their achievements.

The aim of this collection is to inspire us to make changes and find out ways that we can help people within our community, to understand the issues that can be faced by people displaced from their homes and to help shape future areas of work and research.

**[refugeeweek.org.uk](http://refugeeweek.org.uk)**



This year over 70 million people across the world have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are 26 million refugees, forcibly displaced due to war, terrorism or persecution - over half are under the age of 18 and only one per cent are in higher education.

In response, the University of Edinburgh continues to work with, and in support of, refugees to increase their access to higher education. Refugee Week is a time for us all to celebrate and recognise the incredible contribution that refugees make

to our country, culturally and economically.

I strongly encourage you to support Refugee Week, join an event, educate yourself and speak up for refugees whenever and wherever you can. As we know, our university, city and country has a compassionate and proud heritage of welcoming refugees - we must continue to do so.

**Alan Mackay**  
**Deputy Vice-Principal**  
**International and Director of**  
**Edinburgh Global**



Refugee Week is important because it provides a great opportunity to showcase not only the amazing things people are doing to support one another but also to celebrate and welcome those new to the community. What I have seen about Edinburgh both living here and through working with the refugee community is that the city's commitment to inclusivity and welcoming nature has made the world of difference.

**Khadija Binladen, Winner of  
Unsung Hero Award**

## STORIES SHARED

**Andhira**

**Khadija**

**Jacob**

**Colours of Edinburgh**

**Housewarming**

**Scholarship holder**

**Food security researchers**

**Nasar**

Thank you to our community contributors for sharing their stories.

**Shakya**

**Refugee Community Kitchen**

**Star**

**Syrian Futures**

**STTEPS**

**SolidariTee**

**Mari**

**University of Sanctuary**





# ANDHIRA

Andhira is a current PG student who was chosen as one of 20 most influential women in the University of Edinburgh by the Students' Association this year.

Andhira is self-motivated and proactive young woman who works with her community to make it a better place. She is originally from Sudan but, has lived in a refugee camp in Kenya. Because of her personal story, Andhira has always stood up for the rights of migrants and other displaced people. Andhira holds a bachelor's degree in international studies from the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and currently pursuing MSc in international Development from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland (UK).

She has four years of experience working with local, regional and international organisation, gaining experiences in areas such as refugee assistance, communication and peace building. In furtherance to this, she has been involved in several conflict resolution programs, and resource mobilization for community development programs. Having co-founded a youth led organisations namely, the Nuba foundation, she deeply understands the unique challenges faced by young leaders. Andhira is specially attuned to challenges faced by women leaders and girls in Africa and more importantly the displaced woman.

She volunteers as program manager in Nuba Foundation and her work include formulating and implementing youth empowerment and resource mobilization programs. she also organises Sudanese refugee youth consultations designed to

give refugee youth voice through dialogue with each other, and with the concerned stakeholders on issues affecting them.

She has used her voice as a refugee youth leader to mainstream youth concerns and especially displaced youth in several national and international conferences she had an opportunity to attend. As a refugee youth Ambassador, she participated in highlighting issues surrounding refugees in Africa "2016 Hunger Free Campaign" in Taiwan. she further participated in the 2019 Pan-Africa Youth Forum in Ethiopia, where she advocated for the concern of displaced persons especially concerning peace and security efforts in Africa. She has been recognized by IPHRD-Africa in 2018 as young woman mediation Ambassador for her work in peace building and youth empowerment.

She was also remarkably among the most influential 20 women of 2020 at the University of Edinburgh. Currently, Andhira serves as a board member a youth-led initiative called Volunet Africa, which is to be launched soon. She also serves as an Advisory council member of UNESCO Africa, where she shares in setting organization policies and seek resources to transform more lives of disadvantaged communities in Kenya. Andhira's most important role is to inspire young women and especially young refugees.

# KHADIJA

## **Congratulations to our incredible student member of the Refugee, Asylum & At-Risk Advisory Board - Khadija Binladen - the winner of the Unsung Hero Award.**

Khadija Binladen is a fourth year International Relations student and member of the Refugee, Asylum and At-Risk Advisory Board, who was awarded the "Unsung Hero Award" at the online Student Awards this year.

This Award recognises a University of Edinburgh student who has acted selflessly for a cause they are passionate about. Khadija has dedicated substantial amounts of her own time and energy to various Edinburgh refugee projects that are highlighted in this article, and has made a real impact on the lives of others. From managing the Befriending Scheme in the Syrian Futures Project, to being

a Community Outreach Officer for Student Action for Refugees Edinburgh (STAR), Khadija works tirelessly to make all feel welcome. Incredibly, she is also the President of the Edinburgh University Middle Eastern Society, founding member of the Coexistence Initiative and organiser of STTEPS (The Syrian Teenage Tutoring Education Programme).

## **How did you get involved with all of these different projects?**

I don't know how to answer this because they sort of found me. When I started university in 2016, I had no idea that any of these projects were running and some didn't even exist at all then. It all really started when a friend of mine said they needed Arabic speakers to help with a tutoring group once a week. So I volunteered, and honestly everyone knows that I am incapable

of saying no when anyone asks for help or my time so I just kept saying yes and getting involved - and I am so glad I did!

## **What drives your commitment to improving the experience of, and creating a positive environment for all members of the University?**

I wouldn't really say that I actively have a commitment to improving the experience of, and creating a positive environment for all members of the University because being inclusive and welcoming is almost second nature to me. From personal experience I know what it is like to be wrongly judged on stereotypes or false information so I work really hard to make sure that others never have to feel that way, and that every environment I am a part of is a positive and welcoming one. Every individual is different but our differences make us unique

and interesting and they should be celebrated! Each project I worked on became more than a project it became personal. Supporting and encouraging one another and making sure everyone felt that they had a place and were valued. Being part Middle Eastern, inclusivity and making everyone feel welcome, is a huge part of my culture and how I was raised.

## **What outcome are you most proud of from all your amazing work?**

I am proud of all of it, but a key moment for me that really changed my perspective on why I get involved and volunteer so much was at Syrian Teenage Tutoring & Educational Programmes (STTEPS). I have been a lead organiser at STTEPS since my second semester of first year and the young Syrians I met on my first day were not the same individuals



I saw on my last. Seeing them bloom into confident, talkative and engaging young individuals who really feel comfortable in their new community as well as improved academically was well worth the time and effort. Many of them could not speak a word of English and were not performing greatly academically when we first started but four years later many of them are excelling in the sciences and maths, speak English with Scottish accents and are actively engaging and interacting with their tutors and making friends. They have all made me so incredibly proud and I am so honoured to have been a part of their lives so far.

Also, at the Middle Eastern society this year, we had the highest number of non-middle eastern student memberships which was another proud moment for me as

it really showed how our efforts to be inclusive and create a friendly and welcoming atmosphere were working.

### **Why do you feel Refugee Week is important?**

I think that Refugee Week is important because it provides a great opportunity to showcase not only the amazing things people are doing to support one another but also to celebrate and welcome those new to the community. What I have seen about Edinburgh both living here and through working with the refugee community is that the city's commitment to inclusivity and welcoming nature has made the world of difference. The Syrian community for the most part feels really welcomed and safe here and a part of the Edinburgh community. Events like refugee week where their presence is supported and

celebrated is key to creating this environment.

### **Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

Each project is unique in its own right and committed to encourage members of the university to work towards creating a positive and inclusive environment for all. It has been so wonderful having increased university support and recognition for all of them but I do think more can be done especially in encouraging students to take more responsibility in interacting with and supporting their wider community.



# JACOB

**Jacob Sobolev received an Asylum Seeker Scholarship to study at the University of Edinburgh.**

I am really grateful to the University for the scholarship as I would have never been able to go study in a university if it wasn't for this scholarship, it gives me many opportunities for the future, and it really did change my life for the better, also the University always looked after me and supported me throughout the years, because of the scholarship I had the means to experience

the student life to the fullest and I never felt excluded. It makes me proud to represent and be part of the University. I am always telling people how this University really looks out and cares about its' students and this is not something that is taken for granted because I did not get this kind of opportunity and treatment in any other place. In the future I would like to contribute to the continuation of the scholarship scheme and help other students at the university.





# COLOURS OF EDINBURGH

Colours of Edinburgh was started in February 2018, initially as an offshoot project with both old and new members of the University's STAR (Student Action for Refugees) project, but soon branched off into an affiliated, but independent, project. Originally born with the simple idea that art unites hearts and minds, and that this was a still under-utilised way to showcase refugee/asylum seeker stories,

journeys and talents, it quickly evolved into more and Colours' first team successfully hosted a mini short film festival, and its first annual art exhibition within 6 months of its birth. Now in its third year, Colours continues to bring together an evolving team of student and alumni volunteers from the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, and the Edinburgh College of Art.

## Our mission:

To provide a platform for newcomers seeking refuge to share their stories through art, research, and digital media, with the intention to challenge negative misconceptions surrounding the refugee and asylum seeker community.

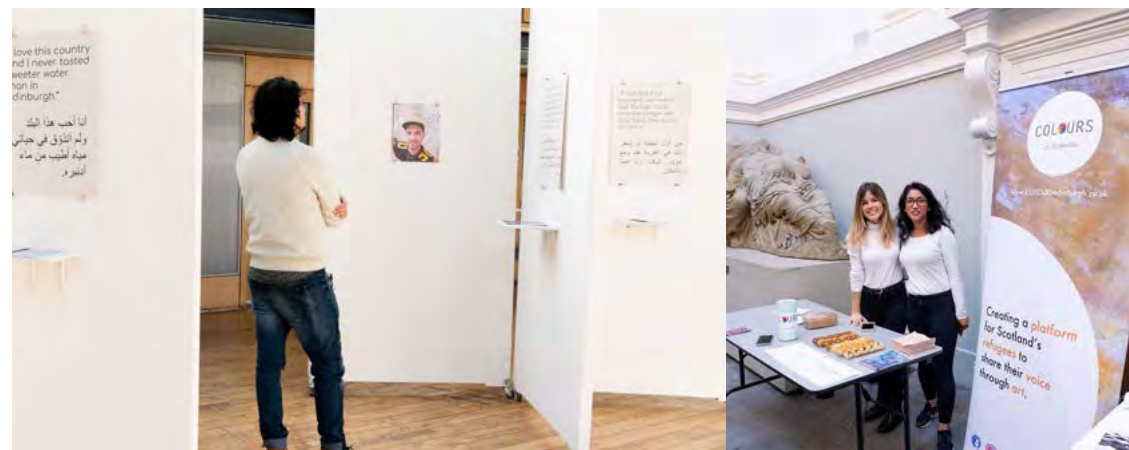
## Our vision:

To see a world where newcomers, everywhere, are accepted with open arms. We work towards achieving this vision through:

- Challenging negative misconceptions of refugees and asylum seekers through art, digital media, and educational events
- Aiding newcomer integration through creative community building
- Raising funds for local charities working to build better lives for refugees and asylum seekers

To date, we have partnered with local charities such as Bikes for Refugees, Refuweegee, The Welcoming, and have worked with the Refugee Voices podcast, the Edinburgh Council's Refugee and Asylum Seeker department, the New Scots initiative, STTEPS, and many others. We have also worked with 16 refugees both locally and worldwide, who have used our platform to share their stories, raised over £2300 for our partner charities, and have reached over 255,000 people through our social media awareness and voice-highlighting work.

We have held two short film festivals, both held in the University of Edinburgh. The first, the standalone Refugee Film Festival in our first year, and 'Stories Behind the Shells' a Yemeni film festival held in collaboration with To Yemen with Love. We have held a panel discussion, also at the University of Edinburgh, on 'The Representation of Refugees'





which had 300 attendees and featured panellists such as Nihad Al-Turk, a local resettled Syrian refugee and artist, Refuweegee founder Selina Hales, and Syrian The University of Edinburgh Media Studies student Marwa Daher, as well as Fee Gerlach- regional coordinator for the Scottish Refugee Council. We have held two annual art exhibitions- 'Through the Eyes of Scotland's Refugees' in 2018, and 'Lives in Transit' in 2019. These have showcased work from both local and regional refugee artists, as well as artists who work with similar themes of shared humanity and belonging, and have featured opening nights with performances and speeches.

This past year, the current team put on a Volunteer Fair, in partnership with various other local NGOs and projects, for local refugees/ asylum seekers and were about to host the 'Voices of Change' panel discussion, featuring speakers

such as Dr Natasha Saunders, who has been published in Refugee Survey Quarterly, The International Journal of Human Rights, and who published a book on International Political Theory and the Refugee Problem, and Syrian Futures' founder Nadin Akta. However, due to the current COVID-19 situation, our panel discussion and planned annual art exhibition had to be cancelled. Since then, we have launched the 'Leave No One Behind' campaign, featuring both educational research and spotlights on refugees/organisations responding to lockdown issues, with the aim of raising £1000 for Choose Love/Help Refugee's Emergency Coronavirus Appeal. This fund goes directly to providing medical assistance, sanitisation equipment, and emergency isolation accommodation for refugee camps. We also have other projects in the works, with the aim of still working towards our mission but, whilst we have to stay at home, online.

**Website:** [www.coloursedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.coloursedinburgh.co.uk)

**Facebook:** [www.fb.com/COLORSedinburgh](https://www.facebook.com/COLORSedinburgh)

**Instagram:** @coloursedinburgh

**Twitter:** @ColoursEdi





# HOUSE- WARMING

Instagram: @ediuniamnesty

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Housewarming was first and foremost a coming together of people, a project that sought to forge a distinct space, though ephemeral, where Edinburgh, as a city comprised of both newcomers and long-term residents, could be celebrated and valorised, not in spite of, but because of the differences of her citizens. All the while, the project focused including and integrating often-excluded voices by platforming those, like Syrians or Palestinians, for instance, whose cultures are not traditionally Scottish, and who are therefore marginalised in the mainstream.

In more practical terms, Housewarming manifested itself as a one-day cultural event, constructed around several smaller activities, such as an art workshop, a film screening and panel discussion, a lunch catered by refugee-owned businesses, musical performance, etc. The Housewarming cultural festival hoped to and (from personal feedback on the day and the days and weeks following the event) managed to offer something rather unique in comparison to many other events taking place at the university, within other societies, and across Edinburgh and Scotland, by handing agency over to participants and empowering them as collaborators in organisation.

To encourage cooperation and involvement on behalf of the various communities that were joining us on the day, the planning committee emphasised that all cultural activities were welcome, with some brainstorming and reformulating of ideas back and forth to suit the venue, budget and goals of the project. As a result, groups could platform any part of their heritage, choosing whatever meant the most to them: for instance, on the one hand, the Justice for Palestine Society decided to teach attendees how to do Arabic calligraphy and also performed wonderful works of poetry, both original creations and recited classics; on the other hand, Syrian Futures screened 'Trojan', a play performed by Syrian newcomers in Scotland through the Trojan Woman Project in Glasgow, which their members found was an excellent way to express and explain to Scottish audiences the experience of a Syrian person who has been made a refugee in recent years.

In keeping with the spirit of including and raising marginalised voices, the Amnesty society took a strong position to never speak over or misrepresent those whom we had the pleasure of working with over a period of several months. For our general organisation, and especially for publicity, this decision slowed down the process, but I do not think



that any of us would have had it any other way. From seeing the genuine enthusiasm of collaborators throughout the planning stages, and listening to their wonderful and innovative suggestions, to finally, on the day of Housewarming itself, hearing that they felt truly connected to the event, as opposed to being solely there as attendees, reduced to only observing an event that someone else has set up for them. To this end, our marketing materials were designed by each party involved, allowing them to define Home through prose and image.

The projects that took place for Housewarming include:

- Syrian Futures screened Trojan, produced by the Trojan Women Project, with a follow-up discussion with some of their members, with Arabic-English interpreting available; Amer Masri

(a local Syrian academic, who is one of the organisers of STEPPS, which is a tutoring programme for Syrian teenagers) performed dabke (a type of dance traditional to the Levant, but also specific versions pertain to different countries like Palestine, Syrian, Jordan, etc.)

- With fellow Syrians; Bilingualism Matters displayed and provided information on artwork made by Syrian young people in a number of workshops they have run in previous years;
- Sweet House, a local Syrian-owned bakery/café, were hired to provide traditional Syrian baklava for the event;
- Noura, a Syrian newcomer to Edinburgh, had recently set up her own catering business known as 'Noura's Kitchen', from which we ordered a full Syrian

lunch for all our attendees, in hopes of supporting her budding enterprise;

- Justice for Palestine Society performed spoken word poetry and carried out a very popular introduction to Arabic calligraphy workshop;
- Tandem Language Society collaborated with us to provide a space to encourage people to speak the languages of newcomers and communities involved in the festival, such as Arabic or Farsi;
- Majid, an Edinburgh-based Kurdish musician from Iran provided musical entertainment in the evening, and was accompanied by Mitra, from the Open Arms organisation, who provided information on their work;

- Solidaritee were present to spread awareness about their campaigns and to sell their t-shirts to raise money for asylum advocacy;
- Linknet Mentoring came to promote their organisation, which is involved in providing mentoring and tutoring to migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other newcomer communities.

The entire project was funded partly by Amnesty International UK, through the Marsh Awards grant, and partly by the Edinburgh Global Community fund, a University of Edinburgh-based programme which aims to financially support student initiatives that are promoting culture and diversity on campus.





# SCHOLARSHIP HOLDER

Anonymised

## Thanks, Scotland, for supporting me.

The political environment in my country pushed me to seek Asylum and spend the coming five years as refugee. Seeking Asylum has become a matter for both sides; the hosting communities who give the support, including Scotland, and for us as Asylum seekers who receive the support, including myself. Therefore, I would not have accepted being supported without paying back at least part of what I received and supporting other vulnerable people who need my help. Therefore, I decided to contribute to solve some factors that push the Asylum Seekers to the Global North for the sake of safety. I believe terrorism is a key driving

factor for millions, including myself, and eradicating terrorism needs everyone's efforts.

Consequently, my current academic work for master degree focuses on the Islamic Terrorism phenomenon, particularly the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Likewise, I would continue my PhD this year in the same field. In fact, the Masters scholarship I am receiving now, is empowering me to build my career in academia and would enable me to be a specialist in terrorism and work as a university lecturer after four years. I strongly believe that my academic contribution would positively, peacefully, democratically, and legally impact on confronting terrorism by, at least, increasing

awareness, reducing the level of radicalisation among many, and preventing the vulnerable, especially women. Eradication of terrorism would reduce the number of refugees in the Global North.

In fact, when I was Asylum Seeker, the university supportively offered me an English course scholarship for Asylum Seekers (English for Academic Purposes Scholarships). Then, after succeeding the course, the university offered me a Masters scholarship for Asylum Seekers. While I am studying, I've applied for a PhD programme at the university and received an offer. However, I cannot fund my PhD studies. In fact, I noticed that the university offers three scholarships for Asylum Seekers (one for

undergraduate programmes and two for Masters) but there is no PhD scholarship. Therefore, it would be very supportive of the university to allocate a PhD scholarship for Asylum Seekers or Refugees like other universities.

Without the Asylum Seekers Scholarships I would not have studied the pre-sessional English course nor continued the current Masters programme and would not have received a place for PhD. Additionally, without these scholarships which are currently empowering me, I would not be able to back our vulnerable people in the Middle East and solve the reasons that push us as Refugees to Scotland.

# FOOD SECURITY



Since 2011, the Syrian conflict has displaced more than 12 million people, both inside their home country and across borders. Contrary to popular belief, most Syrian refugees have remained in the Middle East and do not live in camps. Due to the impact of COVID-19 related movement restrictions on agricultural livelihoods, many displaced Syrians are likely to join the ranks of food insecure people around the world – a population that, according to the World Food Programme, might double over the next year.

Ending food insecurity in the Middle East requires locally informed, sustainable solutions. How can Syrian experts become part of the conversation?

**How will the domino effects of COVID-19 worsen food insecurity for displaced communities?**

**How do displaced Syrians experience the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of food insecurity?**





## Study Team

Our interdisciplinary team, led by Prof Lisa Boden from the Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Security, brings together researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Kent with partners based in the Middle East. One of the strengths of our approach is that we study the relationship between forced migration and food security from different angles: epidemiology, veterinary science, agricultural science, clinical psychology, social anthropology, arts and humanities. We work with the Council for At-Risk Academics (Syria Programme) to build partnerships with displaced Syrian academics currently residing in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The expertise of displaced researchers is an underexplored resource, and

we aim to provide platforms for including Syrian academics into decision-making processes about the future of their country.

## SyrianFoodFutures

The SyrianFoodFutures project aims to establish a network of diverse expertise between Syrian, Turkish and UK-based researchers, practitioners and decision-makers. This approach is informed by foundation research led by Syrian academics affiliated with the Cara Syria Programme. Dr Tom Parkinson (University of Kent) facilitates independent projects, through which our Syrian colleagues explore the history and impact of cultural and religious practice on agriculture, food production, and consumption. In parallel, Dr Ann Wagner (University of Edinburgh) and Dr

Shaher Abdullateef (independent researcher) conduct ethnographic fieldwork with Syrian refugees working in agriculture in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. The Syrian Humming Project, led by Dr Suk-Jun Kim (University of Aberdeen), commemorates the emotional and psychological aspects of food (in) security through an interactive online soundscape developed from a collection of hums and ethnographic narratives from displaced Syrian communities. Dr Clara Calia (University of Edinburgh) looks at the relationship between mental health and food security for displaced communities.

## From the FIELD

Starting in April 2020, and thanks to funding from the UK ESRC-Global Challenges Research Fund at the University of Edinburgh, our

new "From the FIELD" project uses remote surveys and ethnography with displaced Syrians, to assess the impact of Covid-19 on local food supply chains and displaced people's agricultural livelihoods in northern Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Our surveys are deployed remotely by Syrian research assistants who speak the local language and are embedded into the communities that we are studying.

Read more about our views on how COVID-19 will affect displaced and vulnerable populations in fragile and conflict-affected states here!

**Twitter**  
**@SyriaFoodFuture**  
**@Lisa\_A\_Boden**  
**@ann\_wagner\_ed**  
**@ShaherAbdulla**





[www.glimer.eu](http://www.glimer.eu)

**"A great many progressive developments in the western world wouldn't be in existence were it not for the accident of seeking sanctuary and those states that have granted it have found that they've blossomed and done better for them."**

**Nasar Meer is Professor of Race, Identity and Citizenship, and principal investigator of the research project: The Governance and Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees (Glimer).**

**Could you tell us a bit about your project, Glimer?**

The current 'migration crisis' presents openings as well as challenges, and the aim of Glimer is to generate research that will help European cities and regions facilitate the long-term inclusion of displaced people in a way that remakes local spaces. The project is trying to understand how cities and local regions are responding to the so-called migration crisis in a way that is different from what a national level government have been

doing. We are motivated by the finding that there is quite a lot of creativity, support, solidarity and services at local council and city levels, which either isn't properly recognised at national level or is not known about. Part of the rationale behind Glimer is to shed light on this, and help tell an optimistic story that despite a wider global context in which migration is seen as a challenge in a number of countries and rejected to, that actually in a number of places it is seen as an asset.

Inspired by the success of 'welcoming cities' in southern Italy, we work with refugee groups, civil society groups, local authorities, businesses, and others in order to support sustainable urban development and the successful remaking of the local by different communities.

Closer to home, Glasgow is a great example – the city has had the most people dispersed to than anywhere else in the UK. Glasgow has developed a particular ethos and particular story and indeed a whole category in 'refuweegie', incorporating displaced migrants and refugees. The city is clearly doing things differently and is showing how the locality of a city can lend itself to succeeding in a number of different ways, in a way that national level governments can't. Succeeding in terms of successfully incorporating displaced people, getting them into schools, education and work, but succeeding also in other ways in terms of the narratives of who we are and getting beyond 'us and them'. Some of that is about what city life offers. Cities are synonymous of places where strangers meet.

**Why are events like Refugee Week so important?**

Events like this, particularly in a place like Edinburgh are incredibly important. Edinburgh is one of the leading institutions in the world and we are not only curious about the world around us, but have a stake in it. It's imperative that big questions around who and what we are as a city and nation, but also what kind of society we want to have is something that researchers at The University of Edinburgh engage with and take seriously. We are required to. This is publicly funded research and we are talking about the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in the world who may well turn out to be one of our greatest assets.

# SHAKYA

I am a 2nd year student studying Sustainable Development at the University of Edinburgh. I would like to make a testament of my journey as an asylum seeker studying at the university with the help of the 'Asylum Seekers Scholarship'.

My family immigrated to the U.K fleeing from prosecution due to my mother's work as a political journalist in Sri Lanka. The process of seeking asylum in the U.K is very harsh especially for political asylum seekers. A common sentiment that many Asylum Seekers share is the disappointment of the inhumane handling of needs of refugees and Asylum Seekers by the U.K government. To be undermined and disregarded consistently and to be labelled as a burden to the British public might not be the ideal circum-stances that we sought to be in. It can do an incomprehensible damage on one's mental health, especially for young asylum seekers.

However, Asylum Seekers are given the opportunity to pursue higher education at the University of Edinburgh. The Sanctuary scholarships are an important step taken by educational institutions for inclusivity by improving equal access for higher education. I remember the excitement and the relief I felt when the university finalised my Scholarship award. Given the cruel treatment that many Asylum Seeker's receive under the U.K government, the sanctuary scholarship is an invaluable opportunity.

For the past 2 years in university, I have been supported throughout by wonderful staff members (especially the department of Sustainable Development). Lecturers, tutors, and staff members who are responsible for various administrative and non-administrative work have been incredibly supportive. I encourage students who are hoping to pursue higher education to reach out when in need of help or advice.

It is important to note that as wonderful as it has been, it was equally difficult when confronted with obstacles of maintaining education and student life while dealing with issues regarding the asylum process or any other personal circumstances I find myself in. Financial difficulties are immense as I struggled to manage under a strict budget while maintaining a student life; socialising and engaging in student led non-academic activities can be costly. However, I have come to realise how important it is to have a social circle of wonderful friends who understand my circumstances and respected my boundaries. Furthermore, Edinburgh has an incredible body of students who are engaging in various sustainable and less-costly lifestyle practices and exploring these options and adjusting my own consumer choices have been helpful for managing a budget.

However, I would also like to further add that prejudices and ignorance

of the wider society prevails within the university. I have met students that passionately talk about various social issues, whether it is racial justice or issues regarding refugees and asylum seekers, though I have also noticed a clear distinction of "us and them" and that many students were incapable of empathising. In addition, lack of representation and spaces for BAME students had often made me feel even more isolated. I hope the university would address these issues.

Regardless, I am truly grateful for the opportunity that I received, the education and various other skills that I have gained over the past 2 years have broadened my horizon of what I am capable of achieving. For new students who are expecting to start their journey at the University of Edinburgh, I would like to admire your journey, the struggles you have endured, your strength and determination. Always be kind to yourself and most importantly be proud of who you are.



[www.facebook.com/pg/rckedinbrgh](https://www.facebook.com/pg/rckedinbrgh)

# REFUGEE COMMUNITY KITCHEN

The Refugee Community Kitchen was set up by a collective of students and Edinburgh locals; we are very egalitarian and non-hierarchical in structure!

Refugee Community Kitchen formed from a number of volunteers who had met whilst volunteering in Calais, where the central RCK is based which provides between 1000 to 2000 hot

meals a day to refugees and asylum seekers in the Northern France area. The principles of Refugee Community Kitchen is to provide hot meals with dignity to those in Edinburgh who may need it and to fundraise to continue the vital work in Calais. Using local Fare Share food donations to raise funds, awareness, and to support the ongoing work

of Refugee Community Kitchen in Calais – serving hot, nourishing meals to displaced people in the UK and Northern France. Alongside organising fundraising events for Refugee Community Kitchen, we partner with Streetworks and The Settlement project in Edinburgh to provide tasty, wholesome food to those who need it.

## Ella

Edinburgh RCK's weekly student soup lunches was so brilliant because it allowed a natural and community based way to continue the conversation and raise awareness of the dire situation faced by refugees in Northern France everyday, whilst fundraising to support the work in Calais. For me I found it intensely rewarding because it a way to be part of a group, both students and not, and to have those all important conversations and stand in solidarity with refugees in Calais as well as those suffering from food poverty across Edinburgh, not only this but the fact it was completely sustainable and used ingredients donated by supermarkets added an extra positive element.

## Simon

RCK provided a nice thread between the student body in Edinburgh and those in Edinburgh, fostering an environment of solidarity for students and Edinburgh citizens and breaking

out of the often restrictive student bubble, the soup kitchen offered a place of conversation and the distributions allowed us to deliver essential food support to those in need in Edinburgh.

## Aaron

I think people often underestimate the value of a hot meal (especially the cold winter nights in Edinburgh). By rescuing perfectly OK ingredients from around the city, we turn them into delicious bowls of soup and hope that this (really) little act of kindness can bring some nourishment to the homeless. Particularly in this extremely uncertain time, we believe it is important we continue to serve the vulnerable and be there as a constant, assuring presence.

Being a student migrant to Edinburgh myself, and especially because Edinburgh is a City of Sanctuary, it was important that I got involved with RCK Edinburgh and play a part in supporting the culture of welcome I received when I first arrived. This also doesn't require much of me, whether that meant preparing and cooking the soup, distributing to the homeless, or fundraising at the University, and I know that this simple act of love will go a long way: both to benefit local residents and help refugees hoping to seek safety and shelter in the UK.





# STAR

STAR is a key society carrying out refugee work at the University. They are successful campaigners and fundraisers and hosted Syrian Culture Night in collaboration with local group, Syrian Futures, raising money for the 'Sick Kids' charity.

Instagram: @star.edinburgh

Facebook: [www.fb.com/StarEdUni](https://www.facebook.com/StarEdUni)





"If you have to focus on one event, I would recommend our Syrian Culture night which we hosted in collaboration with local group, Syrian Futures. We worked with these local kids and teens to bring together a night of Syrian food, history and dancing. These kids controlled the night and created presentations which they spent much time working on, the food was a homage buffet and it was a huge success raising over £600 in ticket sales."

Syrian Culture Night was supported by the Global Community Fund.

"We are a student group at Edinburgh University seeking to connect students with opportunities to campaign, fundraise and volunteer on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. We aim to educate people on refugees and correct misconceptions. Additionally, we aim to foster a sense of community with the refugees in Edinburgh by engaging and collaborating with them."

Syrian Culture Night: Sharing and celebrating Syrian culture through food, music and dance.

This event was in collaboration with a group of young Syrian refugees from Syrian Futures (about 20) who wanted the night to be used as a fundraiser to raise money for a local Edinburgh charity - 'Sick Kids'. The event helped to change the dynamic of charity givers-charity receivers that refugees often experience, and aimed to strengthen their feeling of belonging in our local community by allowing them to give something back to a cause they're passionate about.

At the event the Syrians cooked a variety of foods from the regions

they come from. They put the recipes on a map to show the different regions and presented/ shared stories associated with the food and their home. They brought in traditional Syrian clothes from home, played Syrian music and performed a dance.

The meal was a wonderful place to facilitate open cross-cultural communication between the youth group, university students and staff, and the wider Edinburgh community.



# SYRIAN FUTURES

[www.fb.com/syrianfutures](http://www.fb.com/syrianfutures)

Syrian Futures started as a bridge to link the Syrian refugee with the University of Edinburgh. The project aims to help Syrian refugees to access higher education and employment. Along with these goals, we work to raise their confidence, and to engage them with the local community so that they have a better understanding of the Scottish culture. This is achieved through organizing social events, workshops, social gatherings, challenges, and online sessions.

We engage with the University of Edinburgh academics, staff and students to organize various events, workshops and activities, such as the Befriending Scheme, which aims to connect students from the UoE, especially Arabic learning students, as well as STAR students, to give the Syrian refugees a safe space to exchange language, culture, education, knowledge and experience.

Some of the students are matched

with elderly, isolated refugee women who are struggling to attend English classes or to make friendships to keep them connected with the community.

This gave the participating Syrian community the opportunity to meet new people, build relationships, express themselves, exchange experiences, engage with the university facilities with other students, as well as to learn and ask about whatever they want and like in a safe and friendly atmosphere.

Syrian Futures organized a fundraising event 'Syrian Culture Night' in collaboration with STAR. Many of the Syrian refugees (youth age) were part of each step of the planning journey. We had meetings with STAR students to discuss what it means to plan a fundraising event, what they would like to do and present, and how best to achieve their plan. They had the chance to plan the day, create their presentations, decide what to present from their culture, such as

culture, food, artwork, dance and so on. One of our aims was to involve them in each phase of the planning in order to raise their confidence, self-esteem, knowledge, and to help them feel worthy and valued.

On the day of the event, many of the students felt nervous and worried, as they invested so much effort and felt responsible for the day's success along with other students and had put in so much time. At the end, we were amazed and so proud of them as they did extremely well. Several of them expressed that it was 'It is unforgettable night'.

We believe that the UoE is a springboard to education for all refugees and disadvantaged people. Taking this into consideration, Syrian Futures planned a Pre-Open Day in collaboration with STAR/ Widening Participation to give the Syrian refugees a safe space to learn and understand the education system in the UK, Scotland and specifically in Edinburgh. It was a very friendly atmosphere which included some presentations from Widening Participation, admission staff, and student ambassadors, followed by a tour around the University.

More recently, the coronavirus pandemic has obligated us to create a new dimension for our work and we are fortunate to have been able to transfer our activities

to an online platform. This has been a challenge and has created concerns over whether some of the refugees are able to understand the new guidelines of the government and NHS. Therefore, we decided to be more visible for the community online using social platforms like Facebook and to translate all documents into Arabic and make it available to the community.

On Instagram the Syrian youth started to share stories of some of their daily activities at home/ and outdoors exercise, as well as the food they are cooking and eating. Taking into consideration the mental health and well-being of our members and being aware of all the frustration as a result of not able to go out and to meet friends, we started a weekly online Catch Up Community Online Meeting, where we meet online in a safe space to share our stories and what we do during this critical period, and how we deal with these new challenges. We discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being at home and we try to keep the spirit up for the whole team. They undertook a 5k Challenge and now we are creating our Cookbook.





## Syrian Teenager Tutoring & Educational Programmes

### The background story

Scotland has committed to resettle 2000 Syrian refugees as part of the UK government Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme by 2020. Of the newly arrived Syrian refugees over the course of the last 5 years, there are over 450 individuals resettled in Edinburgh that have come from refugee camps in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. Amongst them, a group of 36 individuals are teenagers (12-18 years old). This group has had to endure severe hardships before arriving in Scotland. Many of them were denied education due to the difficulty of accessing educational facilities at the refugee camps. However, this group have shown themselves to be amazingly resilient when given educational support

to help integrate them into a new educational system in Scotland with a new language

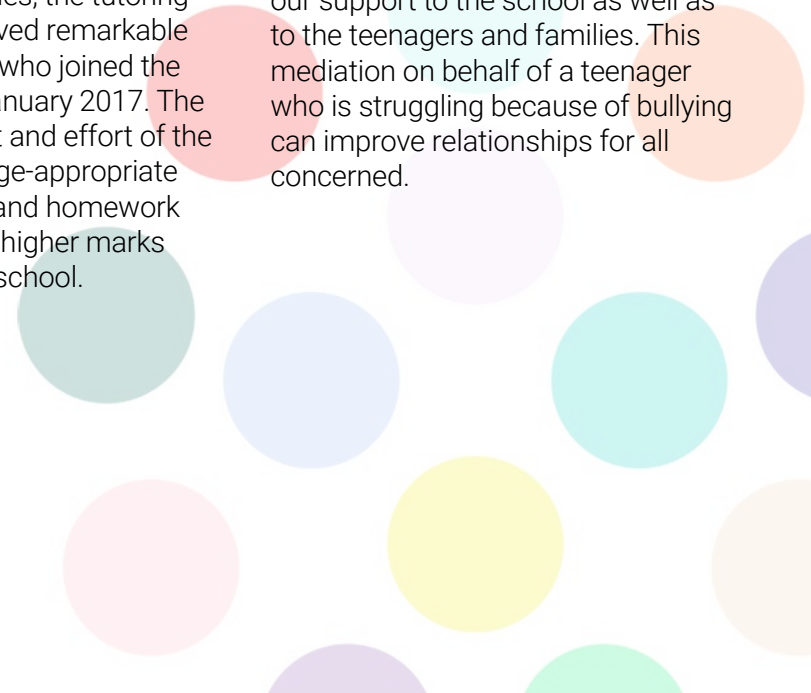
### STEPS

The University of Edinburgh, represented by the Chaplaincy and in co-operation with University student tutors and Dr Amer Masri from the Syrian Community in Edinburgh, launched a tutoring initiative that is first of its kind in Scotland and the UK. The initiative (composed of weekly two hour tutoring sessions) is aimed at supporting the teenage Syrian refugees in their school subjects. The tutoring scheme's goals are to help the newly arrived Syrian teenagers, with their English language skills, and with education in other subjects as well as social

integration. Activities for the Syrian refugee tutoring scheme include practising English in conversation, studying written English and helping with homework in whatever subject the teenager brings to the session. Furthermore, the scheme promotes school success, builds social connections with their tutors, encourages community engagement and helps the teenagers navigate adaptation to a new society.

Despite the difficulties of coping with transition issues, the tutoring scheme has achieved remarkable success for those who joined the scheme back in January 2017. The great commitment and effort of the tutors to provide age-appropriate language, literacy and homework help is reflected in higher marks being achieved at school.

The scheme has also focused on building confidence and self-esteem, organising social activities to reduce social isolation and nurture supportive friendships both between teenagers and the tutoring peers. During every Friday tutoring session, we become alert to any difficulties with bullying or struggles that have occurred in the teenagers' schools in Edinburgh. We have been able at times to go into schools, speaking or writing to guidance teachers or the Principal to offer our support to the school as well as to the teenagers and families. This mediation on behalf of a teenager who is struggling because of bullying can improve relationships for all concerned.



## New developments this year

This year 2019 -2020, the numbers have increased yet again. We have had over 30 teenagers and a pool of over 50 tutors. Fortunately, we have been able to expand into another room in the Chaplaincy which was essential to the smooth working of the sessions. Fun trips have been organised on certain Saturdays, including bowling, skating, trampolining, Deep Sea World. This year, Dr Amer Masri, initiated a Syrian teenager football team. Chaplaincy worked with Sport and Exercise and Widening Participation to secure regular sessions of football in the Pleasance facilities. Dr Amer Masri leads the training sessions and brings in tutors to help. We now have an enthusiastic football team further enhancing our goals of community

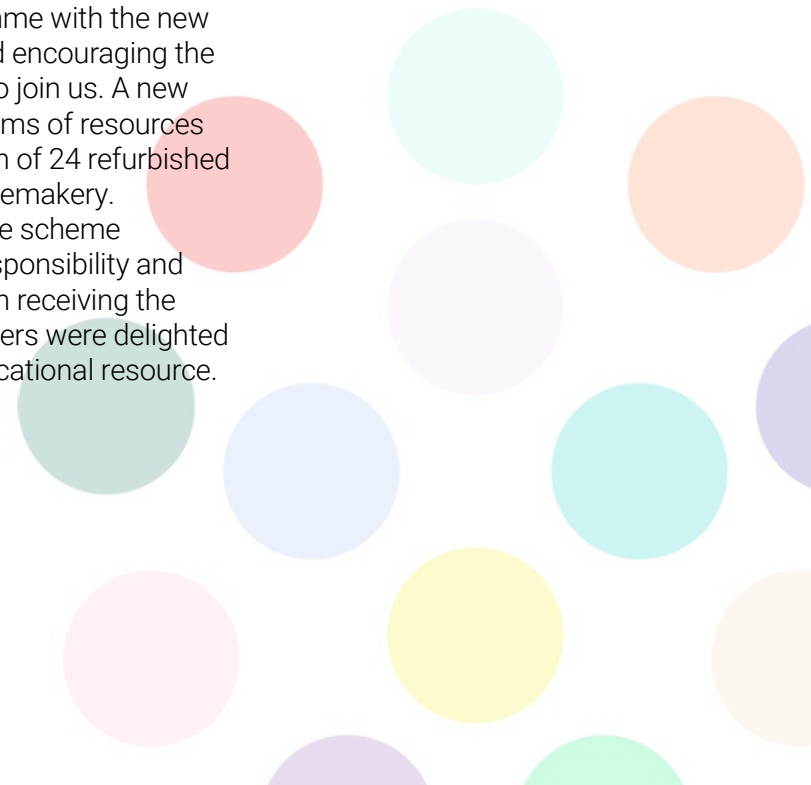
building and fun. One of our tutors, Jo Hill, who is very musical and worked in refugee camps in the Middle East, offered to facilitate a session of singing at the end of our tutoring session on Fridays. It has been a source of laughter and harmony!

None of this would happen without the hard work of the tutors. The core group of organisers, Didi Binladen and Afraa Chohan with Amer worked on the pairings every week - a huge job! Sohaib Ashraf buys the snacks and he with Alex Krabbendam make sure the sandwiches and drinks are all prepared and ready every week. We were glad to have weekly delicious Syrian sweets donated by a supporter of our work though Development and Alumni. Esti Zaid, the student co-founder of the group,

looked after the training session for the tutors which built up their tutoring confidence.

The winning of the SRS award for Community Partnership was a great encouragement as were the visits we had this year from Edinburgh City Council, who are involved with the new Syrian arrivals. They came to offer us support and tell us that they were sharing the news about our programme with the new Syrian families and encouraging the Syrian teenagers to join us. A new development in terms of resources was the acquisition of 24 refurbished laptops from the Remakery. We heard about the scheme through Social Responsibility and Sustainability when receiving the award. The teenagers were delighted to receive this educational resource.

After lockdown, we continue to tutor on zoom and put the teenagers into breakout rooms in pairs. Didi has been great at mastering the technology and setting it up!



# lasting change in the refugee crisis



one t-shirt at a time

# SOLIDARITEE

SolidariTee is the largest entirely student-run charity supporting the international assistance of refugees and asylum seekers, primarily through selling our Solidaritees. Designed by refugees, printed sustainably and ethically, our t-shirts are both a visual demonstration of our solidarity with refugees, and a means to raise vital funds for organisations working in the field. Since 2017, over 20,000 Solidaritees have been sold. That's 600 in our first year, 3,000 between 2017 and 2018, and a whopping

12,000 between 2018 and 2019.

Our campaign gets refugees out of camps by offering grants to NGOs that provide legal aid on the ground.

We are headed and staffed entirely by student activists, originating in a grassroots university context. We continue to be fuelled by the unbelievable energy, dynamism and ambition of young people within our organisation and beyond.

Right now, in 2020, SolidariTee has more than 450 student volunteers from more than 40 universities across the UK, US and beyond, all of whom are committed to making sustainable change in the refugee crisis.

Through a variety of events across the globe, we've been working to raise awareness of our cause by bringing people together. These have ranged from panel discussions and poetry events to comedy shows, theatre collaborations and even a programme of 'Dance for SolidariTee' club nights. We run a range of social media campaigns including our infographic and mythbuster series, to equip the SolidariTee community and those who support us with the knowledge they need to make the change.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the incredible danger it poses to refugee populations, we have written an open letter to European leaders and launched a new fundraising campaign to provide an emergency grant for Kitrinos Healthcare, who amongst other initiatives are working to set up a 'Nightingale centre' in Moria refugee camp.

This is in addition to the grants we have offered to NGOs working to provide legal aid to refugees in Greece.

**Website:** [www.solidaritee.org.uk](http://www.solidaritee.org.uk)

**Instagram:** @teesofsolidarity

**Twitter:** @SolidariTeeUK

**Facebook:**

[www.fb.com/teesofsolidarity](https://www.facebook.com/teesofsolidarity)

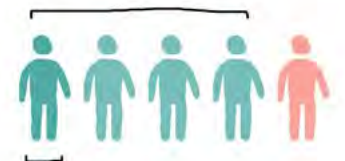


According to the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA). **SOLIDARITEE**

**1 out of every 6 people in Lebanon is a refugee.**



4 out of 5 refugees have been refugees for more than 5 years;



1 in 5 have been refugees for over 20 years.

**SOLIDARITEE**





# MARI

**Mari Young is a third-year student in History.**

"Last summer I worked in a refugee association in Athens called Khora which provides community spaces for refugees of all nationalities, religions, and languages. I think it is so important that, with its 'freeshop', café, sound lab, and jewellery workshop, Khora provides services beyond the 'basic' and 'essential', allowing refugees and volunteers to socialise and relax. I wanted to volunteer in Athens because, after having volunteered in

Calais, I knew how much volunteers, even with only basic skills like me, are valued and needed. I found both experiences incredibly rewarding. It is so important to carry on raising awareness about the marginalisation of refugees in all countries, now more than ever, with refugees among the most vulnerable during COVID-19. As physically volunteering is difficult right now, donating and spreading awareness to push governments to act to ensure the safety of refugees is vital."

# UNIVERSITY OF SANCTUARY

[universities.cityofsanctuary.org](https://universities.cityofsanctuary.org)

In 2017, the University of Edinburgh was designated a University of Sanctuary in recognition of the culture and practice of welcome within the university and our wider communities.

Universities  Sanctuary



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

We are very proud to be one of the Universities of Sanctuary. The Universities of Sanctuary award recognises and celebrates the good practice of universities welcoming sanctuary seekers into their communities and fostering a culture of welcome and inclusion for all. There are 15 Universities of Sanctuary in the UK and we were one of the first universities in the UK to hold this status and the first in Scotland. We continue to work closely with the city of Sanctuary University stream to embed the projects and community engagement.

## What is the University doing?

[global.ed.ac.uk/community/refugee-scholars/university-activities](https://global.ed.ac.uk/community/refugee-scholars/university-activities)

## Helpful links and resources

Edinburgh Global Refugee, Asylum and At-Risk Scholars  
[global.ed.ac.uk/community/refugee-scholars](http://global.ed.ac.uk/community/refugee-scholars)

CARA  
[www.cara.ngo](http://www.cara.ngo)

Scholars at Risk  
[www.scholarsatrisk.org](http://www.scholarsatrisk.org)

Refugee Advisory Service  
[www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/access-for-refugees](http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/international/access-for-refugees)

Universities of Sanctuary  
[universities.cityofsanctuary.org](http://universities.cityofsanctuary.org)

Refugee Festival  
[www.refugeefestivalscotland.co.uk](http://www.refugeefestivalscotland.co.uk)

Asylum Seeker Tuition Scholarship  
[www.ed.ac.uk/tuition-fees/fee-status/work-out/asylum-seeker](http://www.ed.ac.uk/tuition-fees/fee-status/work-out/asylum-seeker)

## Get involved

STAR (Student Action for Refugees)  
[www.star-network.org.uk](http://www.star-network.org.uk)

STAR @ University of Edinburgh  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/17550](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/17550)

Student Societies  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/findasociety](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/findasociety)

Third Culture Society  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/18752](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/18752)

Middle Eastern Society  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/eumes](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/eumes)

Tandem Language Programme  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/global/languages/tandem](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/global/languages/tandem)

Global Buddies  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/buddies](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/buddies)

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Campaign  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice/representation/liberation/bme](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/yourvoice/representation/liberation/bme)

Amnesty International  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/amnestyedinburgh](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/societies/society/amnestyedinburgh)

Justice in Palestine Society  
[www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/volunteering/volunteering\\_groups/20142](http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/volunteering/volunteering_groups/20142)

Bilingualism Matters  
[www.bilingualism-matters.pppl.ed.ac.uk](http://www.bilingualism-matters.pppl.ed.ac.uk)

SolidariTee  
[www.solidaritee.org.uk](http://www.solidaritee.org.uk)

Syrian Futures  
[www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/alwaleed/outreach-and-projects/syrian-futures](http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/alwaleed/outreach-and-projects/syrian-futures)

STTEPS  
[www.ed.ac.uk/chaplaincy/refugee-work/syrian-teenagers-tutoring](http://www.ed.ac.uk/chaplaincy/refugee-work/syrian-teenagers-tutoring)

## Community Partners

AMINA (The Muslim Women's Resource Centre)  
[mwrc.org.uk](http://mwrc.org.uk)

The Welcoming  
[www.thewelcoming.org](http://www.thewelcoming.org)

Sudanese Cultural Forum  
[www.ed.ac.uk/local/projects/university-supports-sudanese-forum](http://www.ed.ac.uk/local/projects/university-supports-sudanese-forum)

New Scots Connect  
[www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/communities/new-scots-connect](http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/communities/new-scots-connect)

Refugee Community Kitchen  
[www.facebook.com/groups/1826011987631245](http://www.facebook.com/groups/1826011987631245)

Scotland Must Act  
[www.facebook.com/ActScotland](http://www.facebook.com/ActScotland)

Colours of Edinburgh  
[www.colouredinedinburgh.co.uk](http://www.colouredinedinburgh.co.uk)

Linknet Mentoring  
[www.linknetmentoring.com](http://www.linknetmentoring.com)

Open Arms  
[www.elrec.org.uk/project/open-arms](http://www.elrec.org.uk/project/open-arms)



[refugeeweek.org.uk](http://refugeeweek.org.uk)