

2021 MID-YEAR REPORT

Our Activities and Impact

HOPETOWNS
Building Refugee Connections

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Hopetowns supports the wellbeing of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, by providing a peaceful and friendly sanctuary. Some of our community members have said it feels like a 'second home' to them and one young person said it feels like 'having a family in London'. Our aim is to take off the pressure of the so-called 'hostile environment' of the asylum process in the UK by helping individuals with difficult processes and paperwork they might not understand, and by inviting them to social events and trips to help them take their minds off their challenges. In Hopetowns, many of our regular volunteers as well as our founder, Samer Mustafa, are refugees themselves.

Thanks to the generous support from our funders, donors and volunteers, Hopetowns has been able to continue its activities aimed at providing different types of support to asylum seekers and refugees in Greater London and Folkstone throughout the first half of 2021, despite the continued challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR IN 2021



So far, the year 2021 has been a productive and successful period for Hopetowns. Despite the continued challenges posed by Covid-19, we managed to adapt our work and reach some of the most marginalised individuals and communities across London and beyond.

Earlier this year, we moved our English lessons online, to make sure our Hopetowns community members could continue learning together in a safe space. To this end, we ran two parallel groups with different language proficiency levels, with an accompanying WhatsApp group to enable ongoing communications and support.

During the month of Ramadan, which many of our community members observe, we handed out special food packs with carefully selected food and drink items to give people a little bit of dignity and to feel 'at home' even when far away from home during this time. We also partnered with London Kitchens and were thus able to distribute ready-cooked meals to six hotels hosting newly arrived asylum-seekers in London.

We have this year also been distributing Welcome Packs to individuals in the London asylum hotels, as well as in the notorious Napier Barracks in Folkstone. These packs contain hygiene products, underwear, socks, jogging pants, a jumper and a t-shirt. In some cases, we provided special packs to cater to individuals' specific needs, such as in the case of six Ethiopian young women who needed our support.

THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK ON PEOPLE'S LIVES

Hopetowns continues to play an important role in the lives of newly arrived asylum-seekers and recognised refugees alike. In 2021, we have continued to bring people together in Covid-safe community events. For instance, to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, we hosted a barbeque event in a London park. We were excited to see many of our community members there, including new groups such as six refugee families from Iraq, Syria, Kurdistan, Yemen and Sudan.

Apart from providing people with an uplifting moment and a fun social event and delicious food, these gatherings serve additional important purposes. First of all, it is a way for newly arrived asylum-seekers to connect with more established individuals and groups on refugee status, who have already gone through the asylum process and successfully started their lives again in the UK. This serves as reassuring evidence to new arrivals that one day they will also come out on the other end of the process; it gives people hope and energy to persist and get through the challenges posed by the UK's hostile environment.

Secondly, our community gatherings are ways to mobilise established communities to act as a support network for young asylum-seekers and provide as much support and self-empowerment and integration guidance as possible. This also helps to take the stress out of young people and it serves to support their mental health.

In addition to our community-based activities and services, our founder, Samer, has also been representing Hopetowns at public events throughout the year so far, and continued to network with partner organisations in the sector. This helps to strengthen our working relationships and access to additional services for our communities beyond Hopetowns' own support.



THANK YOU!

We are very grateful to our funders and support organisations who made our work possible in 2021 so far. It is invaluable for a small community-based group like Hopetowns to be able to access financial support for our activities which enable our participants to get away from the everyday stresses and strains of their ongoing asylum processes. We are particularly grateful for our funders' flexibility during the hardship of the Covid-19 period, enabling us to continue to support our community in different and adapted ways.

Thank you for helping us to provide opportunities for new friendships, support networks and empowerment to take root among some of society's most marginalised and vulnerable groups of individuals.