



Spotlight Month on Refugees & Asylum Seekers

6th – 29th October 2017

***Start a Conversation
Event Pack***

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. How loneliness affects refugees and asylum seekers	2
3. Organising your event	3
4. Holding a film night	3
5. Common questions about refugees and asylum seekers	4
6. About the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission	6
7. About Ben & Jerry's Together for Refugees campaign	7

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in holding a Start a Conversation event as part of the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission spotlight month on refugees and asylum seekers (6th – 29th October).

Jo was passionate about the issue of loneliness, having seen first-hand the impact it was having in her constituency. As Jo said, "young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate".

We hope that Start a Conversation events will provide people, including refugees and asylum seekers, with an opportunity to come together and talk about how isolation can affect those seeking sanctuary in the UK and how to combat it.

How loneliness affects refugees and asylum seekers

Refugees arrive in the UK having fled the horror of war or persecution. They want to rebuild their lives and become a part of their new community. Some thrive quickly, making friends and settling into their new environments. But it can be extremely hard. Many arrive alone, unable to speak the language and without any of the social networks we often take for granted. This can lead many to feel isolated and lonely.

Refugee Action held focus groups across the country with refugees and asylum seekers to discuss their experiences of loneliness. Many of the people we spoke to described feeling isolated, particularly after they first arrived.

*"Everything starts anew. You have to make friends, have to speak English.
Everything – you are starting a new life"*

In particular, they explained how being unable to speak the language meant that they were unable to make connections with the people and institutions around them.

"Language is important to find friends, to find community"

Refugee Action launched the campaign Let Refugees Learn in 2016 that is calling on the Government to ensure all refugees get timely access to English classes and the support they need to attend them. The campaign comes after funding for English classes has been cut by over 50% over the past eight years, leaving some refugees having to wait for years to access English lessons.

Join the campaign! Support the campaign by [signing the petition](#) and encourage others to do so too at your Start a Conversation event. You can also visit www.letrefugeeslearn.org.uk for more information.

Organising your event

The main aims of a Start a Conversation event are to bring people together and to raise awareness of the issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers in relation to loneliness. Beyond that, events can take whatever form you choose! Below are some ideas to get you thinking:

- Hold a film screening of [8 Borders 8 Days](#) and facilitate a discussion afterwards (see below for more information)
- Organise a pot luck dinner event – get people to bring along a dish to share with others
- Put on a panel event with local speakers who can talk about the issue (e.g. refugees and asylum seekers in your community, local political representatives, local journalists etc)
- Reach out to local businesses and art centres – see if they are willing to put on an event during the month

If you are holding an event, do get in touch with local refugee and asylum seeker groups and invite them to join. Contact campaign@refugee-action.org.uk to see if a Refugee Action group is in your area. You could also try the British Red Cross (www.redcross.org.uk) and Refugee Council (www.refugeecouncil.org.uk).

Finally, **let us know that you are holding an event.** Contact campaign@refugee-action.org.uk with details of what you are planning and please tweet us a photo via @RefugeeAction!

Holding a film night

Refugee Action has teamed up with Ben & Jerry's and the International Rescue Committee's [Together For Refugees](#) campaign to offer a Film Night package that you can use for your Start a Conversation event. Each group of 15 or more guests will receive exclusive access to the film [8 Borders 8 Days](#), free Ben & Jerry's ice cream and posters and flyers to publicise the event.

Email benjerryfilmnight@gmail.com to get your hands on these offers and check out their film night webpage for more details at www.benjerry.com/filmnight.

You may want to facilitate a discussion following the screening of the film. Below are discussion prompts from the team at *8 Borders 8 Days*.

Discussion Prompts

Perceptions of Refugees

- *How would you describe Sham, her kids, and the other refugees we saw in the film?*

- *What was surprising about the people or circumstances we witnessed? What fell outside of your expectations?*

Womanhood and Motherhood

- *What ultimately pushed Sham to decide to leave Syria?*
- *Recall the way that Sham was treated before and during her journey. What dangers, threats, and challenges did she face that are unique to women?*
- *What would you tell your children if you had to leave everything behind and become refugees?*

Refugee Experiences

- *The film gave us an intimate look inside the path that thousands of refugees have taken. What were some parts that stood out to you?*
- *What do you think about the way people were treated while making their way through Europe?*
- *When Sham's family arrived in Germany, what roadblocks did they face? What could have helped their arrival and life there easier and more humane?*

What We Can Do

- *What can we do to make sure refugees who are resettled in our community feel welcome?*
- *How can we help our family and friends better understand the crisis and the need to help refugees?*
- *What can we do to reach outside "the choir" of people who are in support of refugees?*
- *What are some common misperceptions about refugees that we can help dispel?*

Common questions about refugees and asylum seekers in the UK

What is a refugee?

According to the UN Refugee Convention, the definition of a refugee is someone who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country' (Article 1, 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

What is an asylum seeker?

The definition of an asylum seeker is someone who has arrived in a country and asked for asylum. Until they receive a decision as to whether or not they are a refugee, they are known as an asylum seeker. In the UK, this means they do not

have the same rights as a refugee or a British citizen would. For example, asylum seekers aren't allowed to work.

The right to seek asylum is a legal right we all share. It isn't illegal to seek asylum, because seeking asylum is a legal process. It also isn't illegal to be refused asylum – it just means you haven't been able to meet the very strict criteria to prove your need for protection as a refugee.

Are there many refugees and asylum seekers in the UK?

No. According to the UNHCR, by mid-2016 there were 117,176 refugees, 34,445 pending asylum cases and 60 stateless persons in the UK. That's less than one quarter of a percent of the UK's total population (around 0.24%).

Is the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK increasing?

Asylum applications to the UK are relatively low – 27,316 in the year up to June 2017. This number is significantly lower today than the peak of 84,000 applications back in 2002.

Where do refugees come from?

The vast majority of people who seek asylum in the UK have fled countries ravaged by war and human rights abuses. In 2016, the largest number of asylum applications to the UK came from nationals of Iran (4,192), Pakistan (2,857) and Afghanistan (2,341).

Which countries help the most refugees?

86% of the world's refugees are hosted by developing countries. According to the UNHCR, as of June 2016 the countries hosting the largest number of refugees were Turkey (2.9mil), Pakistan (1.4mil), Lebanon (1mil) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (979,400).

How many Syrian refugees is the UK helping?

As well as providing aid to the refugee camps on Syria's borders, the UK has pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrians. As of June 2017, 8,535 Syrian refugees have come to the UK through this scheme.

Can asylum seekers work or claim benefits?

Asylum seekers are not allowed to claim benefits or work in the UK. If they are destitute and have no other means of supporting themselves, they can apply to receive asylum support. This is set at around £5.28 per day.

What happens to someone when they get refugee status?

When a person is given refugee status, they have just 28 days to find accommodation and apply for mainstream benefits before they are evicted from asylum accommodation. Many refugees become homeless at this stage.

How can I find out more about supporting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK?

Check out [this webpage](#) for more information about different ways you can support those seeking sanctuary in the UK: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/heres-can-help-refugees/>.

About the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission

What

In January 2017, colleagues of the late MP Jo Cox pledged to keep her legacy alive at the launch of a new campaign against loneliness set up in her name – just six months after her untimely death.

Why

Jo had taken the first steps towards setting up the Commission before she was murdered in her constituency of Batley and Spen, West Yorkshire last June (2016).

Jo was a doer not a complainer and was dedicated to raising awareness of loneliness after she witnessed the extent of the crisis in her constituency. As Jo said in [December 2015](#) *'young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate...it is something many of us could easily help with. Looking in on a neighbour, visiting an elderly relative or making that call or visit we've been promising to a friend we haven't seen in a long time.'*

Research by the organisations supporting the campaign shows that more than nine million people – a fifth of the population – privately admit they are “always or often alone”, a feeling believed to be as detrimental to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day - yet two thirds of those would never confess to having a problem in public.

How

For the first time, members of parliament, policy makers and thirteen leading organisations are coming together to expose the growing crisis of loneliness and find ways to overcome it. Following Jo's example of working across party lines the Commission is Co-Chaired by Seema Kennedy MP (Con) and Rachel Reeves MP (Lab).

Throughout 2017, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness is working to address loneliness and its many different impacts and will focus on the positive action we can all take to recognize it, build connections and help ourselves and/or others. The Commission aims to not simply highlight the problem but more importantly act as a "call to action". Under the slogan 'Start A Conversation', the Commission aims to mobilise the public to help themselves - educating ordinary people on how they can become the remedy – whether it be talking to a neighbour, visiting an old friend, or just making time for the people you meet. The Commission will also target business and Government action and will launch a manifesto in December.

Support

The Commission will be working with the following partners to shine a light on different aspects of loneliness and the positive steps we can all take to combat it – Action for Children, Age UK, Alzheimer's Society, The British Red Cross, The Campaign to End Loneliness, Carers UK, The Co-op, Eden Project Communities, Independent Age, Refugee Action, Royal Voluntary Service, Sense and The Silver Line.

Website: www.jocoxloneliness.org.uk

Twitter: @JoCoxLoneliness #HappyToChat

About Ben & Jerry's *Together for Refugees* campaign

The International Rescue Committee and Ben & Jerry's believe that every refugee deserves a safe place to call home. Right now, record numbers of people around the world are being forced to flee their countries due to war and violence. That is why they have launched *Together for Refugees*.

What is the campaign about?

The EU is considering a historic piece of legislation, the 'Union Resettlement Framework'. The legislation is a unique opportunity to help some of world's most vulnerable refugees by giving them sanctuary in Europe through a managed resettlement process.

Together for Refugees will encourage members of the public to show their support for refugees and to write to their EU representatives, highlighting the importance of refugee resettlement.

Why is resettlement important?

Right now there are millions of refugees in need of safety, with many living in limbo in states neighbouring their country of origin. Resettlement offers some refugees a chance to rebuild their lives. The process identifies the most vulnerable refugees and supports them to resettle permanently in another country, eliminating the need to undertake dangerous journeys.

Once refugees arrive, local authorities and communities are involved; in providing support, whether it's learning the local language, helping to find work, or integrating children into schools, and families into communities. It is also important to remember that resettlement should be implemented alongside other safe and legal routes and a robust asylum system.

In Europe we are rightly proud of our values of openness, tolerance, and diversity. And yet, while the EU has 20% of the world's GDP, it hosts less than 11% of the world's refugees. Vulnerable refugees are forced to make an impossible decision between putting their lives on hold in camps and temporary accommodation, or making perilous journeys to safety. Resettlement offers a better way.

Join the campaign

To find out more about the campaign and to support it, visit <http://www.benjerry.co.uk/values/issues-we-care-about/refugees>