

individuals or families who could host Ukrainian refugees.

Citizens UK can also offer training in how to help those fleeing from conflict, and expertise in the next steps for refugees after the initial six-month commitment runs out.

The charity has helped to welcome 20,000 refugees to the UK over the past five years, using the sponsorship model that is now being used by the government to help with the Ukrainian crisis. It began in 2014-15 by working with 100 refugee welcoming groups across the UK to respond to the crisis in Syria.

If you'd like to help, please see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/ukraine. Our project to help those fleeing the violence in Ukraine is just one of several ways in which our churches help those claiming asylum in the UK.

The charity **Friends Without Borders** holds a weekly drop-in for asylum seekers and refugees at All Saints Church, Commercial Road, Portsmouth. The charity has been running for 27 years, offering practical help and legal support to those claiming asylum here.

The **Rural Refugee Network** was created by churchgoers and others in Hampshire to respond to the need to find private homes for refugees from Syria. This charity not only provided homes, but also a friendly welcome, some furniture and English lessons for these families.

And the charity **Hope into Action** can also help. They inspire churches to buy homes that can then be used to provide accommodation for those who are homeless, suffering domestic abuse, ex-offenders, or those claiming asylum.

For more details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/refugee

Church hosts hub where refugees are welcomed and supported

KADIATOU Conteh doesn't just want to receive help as an asylum seeker. She is keen to help others in the same situation too.

So while her application to claim asylum is being processed, she's helping to teach other refugees and asylum seekers to speak English.

She's just one of several friendly faces that aim to help those who visit the Refugee Hub, based at St Luke's Church, Southsea.

Kadiatou has been in the UK for three years after fleeing from her home in Sierra Leone. She gave birth to Emma in London, and then moved to Portsmouth. She's now joined the choir at her local Roman Catholic church.

"Emma is in pre-school for two days a week, so I want to use those days to help other people, just like I have been helped," she said.

"Some of the people we see don't know what to write on their forms, so it's my privilege to help them. I help the English teacher on a Monday morning."

The Refugee Hub, based at St Luke's church hall, is run by Portsmouth City of Sanctuary – a local charity that aims to offer a culture of hospitality to refugees and asylum seekers.

Every Monday, from 10.30am-12.30pm, it offers casework support, free food and drink, English lessons, and small care packages to take away. That includes basic care items for those who are pregnant or have babies.

Citizens Advice, Harbour Church's Vista project, the Moving On project, and City

of Sanctuary caseworkers are on hand to help with legal and practical advice. They can signpost asylum seekers and refugees to other services that can help.

The Refugee Hub normally welcomes 50 or so guests each week, including families with children. Around half of them might be there to study English, in basic and more advanced classes. Sometimes they run art and craft or other activities. It has been running since October 2021.

Soma Owrahman and her husband came originally from Iraq. They have three small children and their asylum claim has now been accepted. They came to the Refugee Hub for advice about housing and child benefits.

"It is hard when you are in a new country, and everything is new to you – the language and the culture," she said.

"But Monday is a big day, as when we come here we know we can talk to someone. The volunteers are good people."

And Ali Samirand, originally from Iran, has been in the UK for 20 years – and is convinced that what Portsmouth offers is better than other cities he has visited.

"The volunteers in Portsmouth are fantastic," he said. "People are just looking for freedom, and I don't think the Home Office or the NHS do enough, but every Monday I come here as they make you feel so good."

The refugees are also helping to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with a celebration concert at St Luke's Church. They are using storytelling, song and



poetry to celebrate 70 years of her reign – not least because many of them come from Commonwealth countries where she has had a significant role.



Top: Soma Owrahman and her daughter at the Refugee Hub; above: Kadiatou Conteh helps fellow refugees to learn English there; left: Ali Samirand, who has been in the UK for 20 years



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19