

# An act of kindness at a time of serious need

The first year post-arriving is critically challenging for refugee families in the UK but imagine if that is during a pandemic! We want to share our story very briefly.

We are husband and wife and we are a refugee family in the UK. We are six people in the family, consisting of two sons and two daughters aged 17, 14, 8 and 6. My husband arrived in December 2018 and we were reunited with him in March 2020, just when other parts of the world were already hit by Covid-19 – however things were still OK but uncertain in the UK. My husband was living in a one-bedroom flat in Salford, Manchester which was provided by the Housing Association. Based on law, the Government would not provide a family house unless families entered the country.

In a couple of days, my husband managed to book an appointment with the Job Centre and the Housing Centre, and had us registered. Despite being extremely overcrowded, even under normal circumstances, it would take five weeks for Universal Credit and three to six months for Housing Benefit to come through.

The six of us had to stay in the one-bed room flat as there was no other option. Living in a one-bed room flat and managing life with only £317 per month from my husband's Universal Credit was extremely difficult. We had to borrow some money. This was not the only problem. The UK was starting to go towards lockdown. We had to go to London to pick up our ID cards (biometric residence permits) from the post office. In London, we were housed by a kind British family whom my husband had found through Refugees at Home. Prior to our arrival, my husband was given shelter for a while in their house when he had ended up homeless during my asylum process. Now the same family was housing us – a family of six.

The pandemic had already got worse and living in an overcrowded space was against the Government's advice and a great risk to my family's well-being as well as the host's. Government services were shutting down and we did not want to return to a one-bedroom flat. With our host's agreement, we stayed for few more days in their house to figure out what we can do. We went to several boroughs in London but we hardly found any staff as the Government was encouraging everyone to stay home. We were told that even under normal circumstances it would be very unlikely that we would be given a house in London in such a short time – much less now that the services were impacted by the pandemic.

It was a race against time and challenges faced us from all directions. No money. No house. At high risk of Covid-19 due to exposure. Government services inaccessible. Over-staying at our kind host in the time of pandemic when social distancing was already advised. Our host was still extremely kind and patient even then, and actually lent us some cash to buy basics for the kids. We were in total despair and had no idea what to do.





*Volunteers transported donated bikes to the new home, as well as helping to furnish it*

At such a time of hardship and crisis, the Wycombe Refugee Partnership came to our help and saved us. They saved a family. Homelessness, running broke, a killer virus were the minimum immediate threats we were encountering but they were not the only ones. Having just arrived in the country, we had no registration with the NHS, no proof of address, no bank account, and with public transport being disrupted, no means of transport – and we knew nobody.

Only God knows what could have happened if WRP did not come to our help. WRP provided us not just a house and emergency cash, but every possible support with everything we needed during

our stay in High Wycombe. WRP gave us a very warm welcome and gave us the sense of a new family. WRP helped our family with so many things that it would be difficult to list all, but just to mention a few: GP registration, access to library, school applications, job applications, Job Centre. Their kind volunteers provided online English and maths classes for us. We stayed for five months until we managed to find our way forward with WRP's help. On a daily basis, WRP provided us with a lot of good advice and guidance about life in the UK. WRP's help did not end here. They helped us with our move to the new house and provided us their resettlement assistance. They know very well what families need and when.

WRP's support was not limited to financial and material aspects. They supported at a time when we felt completely lonely and socially isolated for being new to the country compounded by the imposed stay-at-home policy of the government due to the pandemic. The importance of such intervention and support, the value of taking the hands of a newly arriving refugee family, and showing them a smiling face is beyond measurable values and cannot be underestimated. We made friends with the WRP and others in town through WRP.

While WRP's help and support is beyond appreciation and gratitude for us and we are wholeheartedly grateful for their act of kindness and generosity, we write this story not just to thank WRP but also to highlight how vital, timely and important their intervention was. Without organisations such as WRP in place to fill the gaps in the asylum system, compounded with the pandemic issues, refugee families would be extremely helpless and vulnerable and face just another huge trauma upon arrival, while escaping from other traumas from their home countries. WRP's assistance to us was equal to life saving and this is why no words would be enough to thank each and every one of them for their great work and services they do for humanity.

We highly value and respect what you do, not just because you helped us but because you have helped many and we hope you continue to do so.

We just cannot thank WRP enough for their great services, kindness and contribution to humanity.

