

YOUR ACTION

Issue 15 2025



**"LIVING IN AN
ASYLUM HOTEL
WAS ONE OF
THE HARDEST
EXPERIENCES
OF MY LIFE."**

Liyana shares how the dehumanising reality of being housed in hotel accommodation left her feeling trapped.

**SEPARATED FROM FAMILY AND
AT CRISIS POINT**

**REFUGEE
ACTION**

Mounir spent more than two years separated from his family and his mental health reached crisis point. Your support ensured he wasn't alone. Read more on page 12.

MY VOICE, MY STORY

My name is Liyana*, and I'm an asylum seeker living in the UK. I'm deeply honoured to be your Guest Editor and to share my journey with you.

I want to shed light on the struggles faced by people seeking asylum, especially those like me, who have been housed in hotels while waiting for a decision.

Having spent six months in that situation, I experienced first-hand the isolation, stress, and the dehumanisation of the asylum system.

It's not just about adjusting to a new country or culture – it's also facing constant uncertainty and the pain of feeling invisible.

Trapped in a single room, it felt like my life was on hold with no end in sight.

What kept me going during those challenging times were moments of hope – like when Refugee Action visited and offered their support.

They reminded me that I wasn't completely alone – that there were people who truly cared about my well-being.

I want to use my voice to share the challenges, but also the resilience,



hope, and strength that so many people seeking asylum hold onto every day. Read more about my experience on page 6.

I hope that by sharing both mine and others' stories, I can inspire you to continue supporting us.

I want to amplify the voices of those who feel too overwhelmed to speak up and encourage change for others still waiting in uncertainty.

Together, we can help create a brighter future, by standing in solidarity with those seeking sanctuary.

Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you.

Liyana

Guest Editor

Our Guest Editor serves to amplify the voices of those with lived experience. They contribute to the concept, creative, and content of our newsletters.

In this edition...

Page 4

The power of a welcoming community

Learn more about how we partner with local organisations to host community integration days

Page 6

The dehumanising reality of living in a hotel

Guest Editor, Liyana*, shares her personal experience

Pages 12-13

"I was having too many troubles in the hotel. It felt like a prison. I became suicidal"

Mounir shares his experience of isolation while seeking protection in the UK

Pages 16-17

"It's important that people feel empowered, not just have decisions made for them"

Asylum Crisis Project Coordinator, Hannah, speaks to Liyana about her work supporting people facing crisis

Page 22

Pete's Race for Refugees

Read about our fantastic supporter, Pete, who decided to run 60km for Refugee Action between his chemotherapy rounds



*Please note names may have been changed and alternative imagery used to represent the people featured throughout this newsletter. These will be indicated by an asterisk. This is to protect the identity of our team and those our services reach.

THE POWER OF A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

People seeking safety are often forced to leave behind their support networks and arrive in the UK without anyone to turn to for advice. Creating a community for the people we reach offers them a vital source of hope, allowing them to connect and find relief.



In the last year, our team in the West Midlands began partnering with other refugee support organisations in the region to host community days.

These days aim to celebrate different cultures, provide a space for people to connect with others living in the asylum system, and learn more about services available to them.

Last summer, one of our community days brought together 20 team members from nine partner organisations. We hosted sessions and provided information on education access, mental health support, and other essential services.

One of the most popular sessions that day was a therapy playtaster session for women and children. This session allowed families to connect and develop stronger connection.



CELEBRATING DIFFERENT CULTURES

Our community days aren't only a space where people can access vital information, they're also a space to come together to share stories, cultures and even meals.

Some of our attendees share what the time meant to them:

"I wanted to express my heartfelt appreciation for the event. It was wonderful. The packs given to the kids brought them so much joy, and the toiletries packs made us equally happy.

"I feel so fortunate to have discovered Refugee Action; it allows us to connect with other families. May you continue this meaningful work, arranging such wonderful events for us. A big thank you to you and your team.

"Some people were advising on how to deal with our problems. And they also gave information about some English and IT courses. That's important. Thank you for everything.

"The food, venue, and organisation were exceptional. I only wish we had more events like this!

We hope that more events like these will help individuals heal and feel more hopeful about their future. Your support makes this possible. We are eager to expand what we offer to continue empowering people, fostering meaningful connections, and building stronger communities.

OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS...



More than 9 organisations collaborated to offer support and advice on identifying and addressing hate crimes



We hosted 5 community days to warmly welcome Syrian and Afghan refugees and people seeking protection



Our Navigator project supported **372 families** providing a safe space for them to share their concerns



Over 35 school packs were provided to families to equip children with essential resources for their education



Over 50 children participated in engaging activities designed to give them a sense of freedom

THE DEHUMANISING REALITY OF LIFE IN A HOTEL

"Living in a hotel for six months as an asylum seeker was one of the hardest experiences of my life." – Liyana*

I came to the UK seeking safety, but instead, I found myself stuck in a single room, day after day, with no idea of what the future held.

The uncertainty was overwhelming, and it felt like I was in limbo—neither here nor there.

Adapting to a new country was already difficult, but living in a hotel made it even worse. The food was unfamiliar, and of poor quality, and many times, I struggled to eat it.

Some nights, I went to bed hungry.

As a result, I lost a lot of weight, which affected my confidence and made me feel even more isolated.

The loneliness was crushing.

I didn't know anyone, and there were no familiar faces to turn to. I spent many nights crying myself to sleep, wondering if things would ever get better.

It was like the walls of that room were closing in on me. Every day felt like a repeat of the last. The stress and uncertainty about my future weighed heavily on me.

However, during that difficult time, Refugee Action became a lifeline.

Caseworkers would visit the hotel frequently. These visits brought some relief and hope. They not only offered their services but provided emotional support. They encouraged people whenever possible.

They didn't just help with practical things – they helped me see that there were people who cared.

Their kindness and understanding made a big difference when I felt most alone.

Living in a hotel while waiting for dispersal is more than just inconvenient – it's dehumanising.

But knowing that there are organisations like Refugee Action who see our struggles and offer support makes the journey a little more bearable. It gave me a glimpse of hope when I needed it most.

Refugee Action's service teams regularly visit people living in hotels, offering vital support. **We host coffee mornings where caseworkers can provide updates to people on their cases**, and share information about ways residents can get involved in their community.

In the aftermath of the far-right riots last summer, our teams were able to expand our services, providing additional well-being sessions in hotels across Greater Manchester and the West Midlands.

Residents reported feelings of fear, depression, anxiety, re-traumatisation, and terror. Many shared their distress, asking, "Is this how I am going to die?"

PROFITS OVER PEOPLE: FIXING THE CRISIS IN ASYLUM HOUSING

Tens of thousands of people seeking sanctuary in the UK are forced to live in substandard housing and inadequate oversight leaving them vulnerable to health and safety risks.

When people claim asylum, they often endure years trapped in hotel rooms that are de facto detention centres.

People are segregated from society, stripped of independence, and targeted by far-right attacks.

Others are placed in crumbling housing, where their dream of a safe home is shattered by collapsing ceilings, mould, damp, broken locks, and infestations.

The harsh truth is these properties end up clustered in areas where housing is cheapest because Home Office contractors seek to minimise costs and maximise profit.

Local leaders are left powerless as profiteering companies segregate and divide communities.



The current housing system mirrors broader patterns of institutional racism, where people of colour bear the brunt of exploitative and dehumanising policies under the guise of immigration control.

People seeking asylum are scapegoated for problems caused by governments who fail to properly fund councils and increase social housing.

We all know it's not for a lack of money. The contractors providing this accommodation have reported huge profits, including Clearsprings, which has made £180 million in the past three years alone. In another system, this money could go to communities.

A NEW ASYLUM HOUSING APPROACH IS URGENTLY NEEDED

That's why Refugee Action is launching a research project to design a system that works for everyone in our communities.

We believe people seeking asylum should be housed by local and regional authorities, just as anyone at risk of homelessness would be.

They should have proper funding and government support.

But we can't fix asylum housing without addressing the broader housing crisis. Real change requires a bold overhaul of social housing provision.

WE WANT TO SEE THE GOVERNMENT:



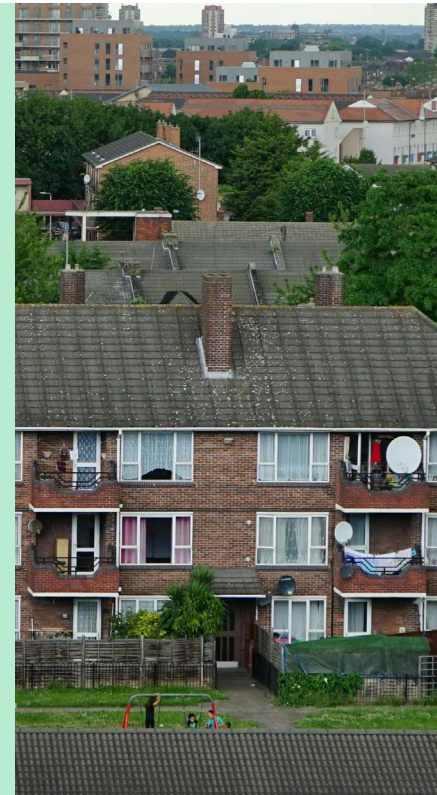
Committing to building 90,000 new social homes each year for the next 10 years



Creating a capital fund scheme for councils to buy homes off the private market



Reforming the right to buy scheme to meet the housing demands



WORKING TOGETHER FOR A HOUSING SOLUTION

We know there are significant barriers to local delivery, which vary across regions.

This is why we're engaging with local authorities across England at a series of policy roundtables to better understand these problems and develop solutions.

Our goal is for all people to be housed in dignity in a united system delivered by local people for local communities.

At Refugee Action, we believe that people seeking sanctuary in the UK should not be exploited for profit by those in power. Learn more about our Most Wanted campaign, here www.refugee-action.org.uk/wanted or scan the QR code.



WELCOMING FAMILIES SEEKING PROTECTION

FIGHTING ISOLATION

People seeking asylum often feel isolated and uncertain upon arriving in the UK. Our Bradford team runs a variety of weekly sessions designed to combat these feelings of isolation.

Led by our team and supported by volunteers, these sessions aim to create safe, supportive environments where people can access vital information and build meaningful connections.

We offer case advice, mental health support, and host welcoming activities.



WELCOME SESSIONS

Each week, parents can bring their children straight from school to our community welcome session. Here, families can craft, play games, and even take part in a friendly football game with others.

These moments of connection and shared experience help families feel genuinely supported and part of something bigger.

What we offer:



BASIC ENGLISH
LANGUAGE SKILLS



CRAFTING ACTIVITIES
FOR CHILDREN



REFRESHMENTS AND
WARM MEALS



FOOTBALL AND
OUTDOOR SPORTS



HAIRDRESSING
SERVICES



BOARD
GAMES

COLLABORATING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Many of the people we support carry the weight of past trauma. To help them heal, we've partnered with Solace – a local therapeutic service provider. Together, we offer well-being sessions designed to release stress and help people feel safe again.

For many, these well-being sessions are the first place they've truly felt seen and understood since arriving in the UK.

It's here that they find the courage to face each new day, surrounded by people who care and understand. It's a space where hope begins to grow again, one conversation at a time.

“

The sessions are helpful; I can relax and I'm able to support others. I love attending. It's wonderful to see new people join and enjoy themselves. I always say that one session a week isn't enough.

GROWING HOPE: BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH GARDENING

Last summer, we were able to expand our project by launching a new gardening club.

Nature is a powerful healing tool and an effective way for people to look after their mental health.

Anyone can garden together – regardless of cultural or language barriers.

The club provides a much-needed break from the pressures of the asylum system. By nurturing plants, the sessions encourage physical activity and mindfulness.

It's also a chance for people to build new friendships, helping participants feel more connected to nature and one other.



YOU'RE PROVIDING EMERGENCY SUPPORT AND PROTECTING MENTAL HEALTH

CONTENT WARNING: The following story includes references to suicidal feelings. Please read only if you feel comfortable.

Mounir was forced to leave behind his wife and baby son after dangerous gangs threatened his life. He never imagined it would take two years before he saw them again.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, like many of us, Mounir's work came to a sudden halt. He ran an export business in Morocco but, due to the pandemic, he was unable to repay the private loan he'd just taken to grow his company.

The person he trusted as a business partner turned out to be linked to dangerous gangs. Mounir's life was suddenly in danger. He was repeatedly threatened.

"I was beaten. There was no other solution but to leave.

I had to save my life and protect my wife and baby. She couldn't leave the country with me, so I had to go without her. I hoped they'd join me soon after."

Claiming asylum in the UK was nothing like Mounir had imagined. He was moved between hostels, and confined to small, isolating rooms.

But your support meant that when Mounir reached crisis point he wasn't left alone.

His mental health began to deteriorate and the uncertainty of being separated from his wife and son weighed heavily on him.



"I was having too many troubles in the hotel. It felt like a prison. I became suicidal.

"Luckily, I was found and taken to a mental health hospital where they helped me in that moment of crisis."

Mounir was referred to Refugee Action, where he was connected with a caseworker who helped him access mental health support in his area.

When Mounir thought he had no options, Refugee Action gave him hope.

He started to feel in control of his life.

With a Refugee Action caseworker by his side, Mounir began to believe that the safety he longed for could become a reality.

Your support made this possible.

"My caseworker was amazing, whenever I had a question or called her, she always found a solution. She was so helpful, more than she'll ever know."

The team were so good to me, they're angels."

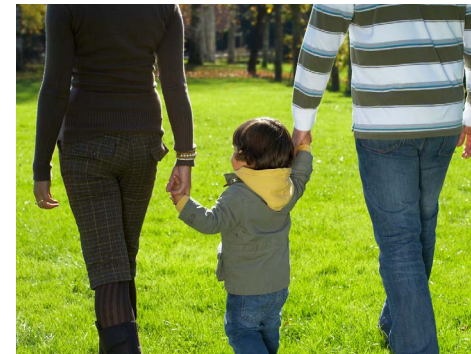
Our crisis team was able to secure Mounir temporary accommodation and ensure he had access to the services he was entitled to.

However, his worry for his family's safety remained.

"My wife and now two-year-old son had to make a dangerous journey. I didn't hear any news about them for three months."

I didn't know if they were still alive or dead."

Finally, two years after leaving his home country, Mounir's wife and son



arrived in the UK.

But their joy at being reunited was short-lived.

"We were finally together. We were told we'd be moved into accommodation suitable for our family."

But when we got there, it was infested with rats. We couldn't believe it."

To make things even worse, Mounir and his wife then received the news that people they support dread – their joint claim for protection status had been refused.

Our caseworker stepped in, helping them secure legal aid to appeal the decision.

Mounir and his family are still waiting for their outcome, and his struggle with his mental health continues.

But because of the services they've been able to access because of your support they feel hope. They know there are people fighting in their corner.

Every day, our teams are contacted about some of the most complex asylum cases, like Mounir's – people who have been left to fall through the cracks.

But together we are reaching them.

Thank you for helping us make a difference in the lives of families like Mounir's.

With your continued support, we can keep providing hope and practical assistance to those seeking sanctuary.

SPOTLIGHT: ASYLUM CRISIS COORDINATOR

As Guest Editor, I had the opportunity to interview Hannah, an Asylum Crisis Coordinator, who I've recently started volunteering alongside. We discussed her role and what motivates her.



Can you tell me more about your role?

My role focuses on advocacy and casework, supporting people facing issues with the Asylum Support system whether it's accessing housing and financial aid, or addressing problems with existing support, like payment amounts or housing conditions.

I've witnessed the great work that you do. Could you share more about what motivated you to join Refugee Action?

My interest in supporting people seeking asylum was sparked by the awful media coverage around 2015.

I volunteered with a charity while

doing my master's [degree], and throughout that time, Refugee Action stood out to me for its impressive campaigning and policy work, particularly in challenging government systems, which is something I value deeply.

In your role, you support people facing crises. How do you balance the challenges they face with the support you can provide?

One of the key things I focus on is preventing false expectations. From the start, I take time to explain the system, its limitations, and what options are available, so people can make informed decisions.

It's important that people feel empowered, not just have decisions made for them.

When me and my mother were stuck living in a hotel, the support you offered us as our Coordinator meant a lot. When stories from people you work with are difficult to process, how do you handle the emotional impact that your role has on you?

It's natural to feel challenged and overwhelmed working in this area because you care about people. My colleagues and I support each other, so I'm never working alone. Acknowledging that you're allowed to be affected is important.

You play a significant part in ensuring that people are supported on their journey. How do you feel about the impact of your work, and how important is it to you personally?

I see the impact of our work every day, especially when small changes, like adjusting families' financial support, make a big difference. It's important that projects like ours exist because, without them, many people would have to navigate difficult systems

alone. It feels like a form of resistance, ensuring that people get the help they deserve.

What is most challenging part of your role?

One of the biggest challenges in my role is navigating the asylum system itself.

We often have to explain Home Office policies that we don't agree with, and it can be tough being the messenger.

How do you think volunteers with lived experience enhance the delivery of our services?

Our work simply wouldn't be possible without the support of volunteers, especially those with lived experience.

As much as I can empathise, there are things I'll never truly understand.

That's why collaboration is so powerful.

Our clients feel deeply connected when they're supported by someone who truly understands their journey.

That's what makes our work so special and meaningful.

Our Asylum Crisis Teams provide caseworker support, advocacy, and emergency assistance to people facing crises like destitution and homelessness.

EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE

PODCAST: RAS VOICE TAKE OVER

For over two years, the Experts by Experience podcast has shared powerful stories from people with lived experience and calls for change.

Late last year, we celebrated an exciting milestone as members of RAS Voice, (one of our Expert by Experience campaigning groups) took full creative control for a special three-episode takeover.

This wasn't just about being panellists. **RAS Voice members led the way, deciding on themes, topics, and speakers, and crafting questions and discussion points.**

Our Communications and Engagement Officer helped them to create episodes that were insightful, inspiring, and full of heart.

The episodes explored RAS Voice's mission and goals, celebrated Black History Month, and tackled racism during the festive season.

This takeover marks an exciting shift towards full ownership of the podcast by volunteers, showing the power of lived experience to lead the conversation and inspire change.



We invite you to tune in to this inspiring podcast, fully led by our Experts by Experience members. You can find it on Spotify, Amazon Music, and Apple Podcasts by searching 'Refugee Action'.

Simply scan the QR code to listen on Spotify.



JOIN HOME MADE



Sign up to our recipe subscription, Home Made, and become a part of something truly special. As a Home Made chef, you'll explore unique flavours from around the world, learn about the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, and make a real difference by supporting them, one recipe at a time.

WHAT WILL YOU RECEIVE?

By joining Home Made, you're not just cooking – you're building connections and getting to know the people you can reach with your support.

For just £10 a month, you'll be sharing the joy of cooking recipes inspired by individuals seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Each month, you'll receive a recipe pack in the post which will include:

- A recipe card
- An ingredients card
- A meet the chef card
- Access to exclusive digital content including video tutorials



Plus some surprises throughout your 12 month Home Made journey, and an invite to a Home Made Facebook community group.

SIGN UP NOW

To sign up to Home Made, visit refugee-action.org.uk/HomeMade, call our team on 0800 141 2426 or scan this QR code

*Please note no food products are included in your pack.



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO BREAK BARRIERS



Last year, we shared insight from two of our Explore, Adapt, Renew project trainees. The training programme aims to remove employment barriers. Now, two new trainees have joined the team and are sharing why they think opportunities like this are so important.

EMPOWERED THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Hassan and Maria* joined the training programme last summer and were motivated to join the team because they felt connected to Refugee Action.

While doing his humanitarian studies, Hassan saw that many of the cases discussed were inspired by Refugee Action's work. He was interesting in supporting people seeking protection and being part of creating positive change in society.

Maria had previously spent time volunteering with the charity and when this opportunity presented itself, she felt that it was a good chance to further supporting people seeking sanctuary, all while developing her own skills.



I knew that it was a great team to work with and learn from. It's exciting to become a member of staff and be involved in everyday work.

- Maria

They both believe in a fairer protection system. As part of the trainee programme, they are committed to shaping a just asylum system and ensuring decisions are guided by the lived experiences of those seeking safety.

EMBRACING OPPORTUNITIES

Working on various projects and collaborating with different teams has been useful for our trainees. The training programme is unique to each individual trainee as their workload is designed around their specific interests and skillsets.

The Explore, Adapt, Renew team work specifically in collaboration with the wider asylum support sector. They partner with organisations to design and deliver projects to transform and strengthen the asylum sector through services which

are adaptive, underpinned by Early Action, and committed to shifting power to those with lived experience.

Maria feels the programme has helped her overcome barriers and become more independent. **"It allows us to take ownership of our work. Managers listen to us and adapt the programme to our needs."**

When you enter a job market in a new country, your previous experience isn't always recognised. This programme changes that.

I truly believe the most rewarding part of this traineeship is what is going to come after my contract ends. This training is helping me to build my career in the UK and gain further employment. There have been so many amazing things I've learnt and been a part of but, for me, the best is what I'm going to be able to do after."

For Hassan, this trainee programme has provided a safe space for him to learn, develop, and grow his confidence in asking questions

For people who face barriers to employment, it can feel daunting to ask for help. He explains that breaking into the UK job market can be nearly impossible for those with lived experience of the asylum system.

"[My team] are very welcoming. I can always ask questions or share ideas. It's amazing - they're great."

For people like me, chances are very limited. This programme helps break those barriers and gives us the confidence to adapt to a new environment."

BUILDING CONFIDENCE TOGETHER

By recruiting two trainees together, it creates a buddy system for their learning and development, something which both Maria and Hassan are grateful for.

Starting something new is always challenging but having someone by your side going through the same things can be invaluable. Hassan believes that Maria has helped him push past personal barriers.

"Being part of this programme together has been one of the greatest opportunities that could have happened to me."

It's empowering to have someone else with you - someone who shares the same struggles. Although it seems very small, without her I'd have achieved only half of what I have. She's helped me to stop holding back and embrace this opportunity."

***To protect the identity of our trainees we have created avatar illustrations to represent their likeness.**

PETE'S RACE FOR REFUGEES

Refugee Action supporter Pete, ran an incredible 60 miles throughout September as part of Race for Refugees, our signature fundraising event - all while living with Stage 4 bowel cancer.



I wanted to do something positive, to show there is life beyond and outside of cancer.

I've been a keen runner for years but am gradually rebuilding my fitness due to the draining effects of chemo.

Reflecting on his motivation, Pete told us, "like many people I guess, I was deeply disturbed by the riots [last summer] and felt helpless to do anything.

But I also didn't want my silence and inaction to imply that I didn't care about those whose lives were being disrupted and threatened by the rioters.

Race for Refugees was a perfect opportunity to take some positive action for those without a voice."

Pete raised a fantastic £1,355, bringing our Race for Refugees team total to a phenomenal £27,670. Thank you and congratulations to Pete and all the racers!



HOST A POTLUCK

This year, we've launched a new opportunity for supporters to stand in solidarity with people seeking safety. Host a Potluck meal in support of Refugee Action – because it's Potluck the hand we're dealt in life.

When someone seeking safety arrives in the UK, they often come with little to no reminders of home. Food becomes a sanctuary – it transcends borders and acts as a powerful connection to memories of family, heritage and happiness.

Hosting a **Potluck** is easy.

Each attendee brings a dish that means something to them.

You choose when and where you host your **Potluck**, and each guest donates to Refugee Action.



SIGN UP NOW

To learn more about hosting your own Potluck head to our website by scanning this QR code.

Sign up now



WAYS TO TAKE ACTION IN 2025

There are so many ways to take action in solidarity with refugees. Whether you love gaming, baking, running or bringing together friends and family, you can use what you love to make a difference. Our team is always here to support you and send you resources, so make sure to let us know what you've got planned by emailing fundraising@refugee-action.org.uk.

DONATE YOUR CELEBRATION

Whether it's your birthday, wedding, anniversary or housewarming, **you can dedicate your celebration to supporting safety and raise money for our vital services.**

Setting up your celebration fundraiser takes less than 10 minutes.

It's one of the easiest ways to raise money for people seeking safety in the UK.



JOIN US FOR REFUGEE WEEK

Join us for our favourite time of year! **During the week of 16-22nd June, we'll be celebrating Refugee Week.** Get involved by hosting your own fundraiser, getting your workplace to raise money or by asking your local cafe, pub or small business to get involved.

Ready to raise funds for people seeking safety? Set up your JustGiving page today! Head to our page www.justgiving.com/refugeeaction or scan the QR code



STREAM FOR SAFETY



Are you a seasoned gamer or a viral streamer? Then game for good and take on a streaming challenge for refugees.

Why not take on a 12 hour marathon gaming session and ask for donations when you reach each next level?

It's up to you what you do, and fundraising is easy on Twitch or JustGiving.

TAKE ON A CHALLENGE

Have you been lucky enough to secure a place in a sporting event next year?

Use your personal challenge to raise what you can for Refugee Action, and we'll be cheering you on every step of the way.



MESSAGES OF COMMUNITY

Here are some heartfelt examples of welcome messages sent by supporters like you to those seeking safety during the festive season.

