

OUR STORY SO FAR

The Hastings & Rother Refugee Buddy Project and Creative Café.



Since Autumn 2017, we have been setting up a project in which people from Hastings, St Leonards, Bexhill and Wealden are invited to offer help of various kinds to the Syrian families entering our community through the Syrian Resettlement Project.

Rossana Leal, the founder and leader of The Buddy Project, has a vision for how this can work to establish a real culture of welcome and hospitality towards our new fellow-citizens from her own experience many years ago for she was another refugee child who had to leave her home and find sanctuary in a new place and a new culture thousands of miles away. [Here is her Buddy Story.](#)

The Buddy Project is taking shape and growing every day. Starting in Hastings in 2017, we branched out in the Bexhill area in early 2019 and as of May 2019 we are now active in Wealden as well! Volunteers have been carrying out ad hoc buddying activities with the newly arriving Syrian families, and in doing so, forming close and friendly relationships.

Buddies are there for all the everyday activities that any family starting a new life in a new country might need help with. For full details of what it is like to be a buddy and how to register please see our website <https://hastings.cityofsanctuary.org/hastings-buddy-scheme>

In summer 2019 we opened our Creative Café and Exhibition Space in St Leonards, called OPEN. We launched with the exhibition 'From Hastings, With Love', for which local photographer Andrew Grainger has taken portraits of families who have arrived in the area as part of the Syrian Resettlement Project, alongside their Buddies – the local volunteers who have been welcoming them to their new homes over the past 18 months.

OPEN will be a safe space for anyone looking for refuge. Our shared values as discussed and agreed in our ongoing consultation with the buddies and people seeking refuge ensure that everyone is treated as an equal, and all persons seeking refuge with respect.

Alongside the exhibition space and community café, OPEN will also host a range of workshops and be available for hire for events and pop-up activities. The aim is to feature artists who are not usually able to show their work, but all enquiries about hiring the space are welcome.

What the local press say about us:

<https://www.hastingsobserver.co.uk/news/people/new-community-cafe-and-exhibition-space-to-open-in-st-leonards-1-8956287>

<https://www.hastingsobserver.co.uk/news/people/meet-the-woman-behind-the-thriving-hastings-and-rother-refugee-buddy-project-1-8994143>

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<https://www.hastingsobserver.co.uk/news/people/this-is-what-it-s-like-to-volunteer-for-the-hastings-and-rother-refugee-buddy-project-1-8994149>

<https://hastingsinfocus.co.uk/2019/03/11/the-aim-is-simple-the-aim-is-friendship/>

<https://hastingsinfocus.co.uk/2019/06/07/from-hastings-with-love-open-to-all/>

<https://www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/news/buddy-up-hastings-local-wins-international-womens-day-award/>

<https://www.hastingsindependentpress.co.uk/features/passion-wins-over-process-e/>