



Malvern Welcomes

Malvern Welcomes Newsletter 2025 edition

Malvern Welcomes supports and offers practical assistance to refugees resettled through government programmes in the Malvern Hills area.

Welcome to Malvern Welcomes Newsletter 2025

In this edition, we focus on the theme of wellbeing. We bring together examples of activities that volunteers and resettled family members have found beneficial to their own mental and physical wellbeing and to that of others.

We look at the contribution of employment towards wellbeing for those employed and those who continue their search for employment. We also include updates on the work of Malvern Welcomes during 2025 – a busy year with many positives — at a time when it is easy to just feel despair.

Whether you are a volunteer, a supporter, or someone looking to understand more, we hope this newsletter inspires you to get in touch, help and care.

Please share the link or pass on a copy of this newsletter to someone you know who may be interested in the work of **Malvern Welcomes**.

The Editorial Team

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Message from the Chair

In a year of ever-increasing hostility to people displaced around the world, it's been easy to be demoralised. The language around illegality and the othering of people in need just seems to feed intolerance and places more barriers to integration and understanding.

We know people do not choose to be refugees. We know asylum seeking isn't illegal. We know that the drivers of migration are poverty, climate change, conflict and persecution.

At its core, Malvern Welcomes has a mission to support those needing to find safe homes when they have had to leave theirs. The practical actions we take address a real and growing need. The volunteers, funders, supporters and yes, even trustees, all help reduce the human suffering caused by forced migration. This is great and valuable work.

Malvern Welcomes has always undertaken education work and has run sessions in schools for local groups and community events. What we have not done to date is be a campaigning organisation. We had good reasons for this. Campaigning exposes our community to possible backlash from a specific section of the public. You only have to look at comments left in reply to Malvern Gazette articles concerning migration to see the risk.

At a recent planning day and at the AGM, there was discussion around whether we should be more vocal on issues. We now have experience in working with refugees and a good knowledge of the complex and nuanced needs that they have as they adjust to life here. We know that successful resettlement can take place outside of large cities.

Given all this knowledge, maybe it is time to be more vocal? We have recently supported a campaign by Asylum Matters (<https://asylummatters.org/>) about the safety of more aggressive actions against people in small boats crossing the channel, and some members took part in a campaign to change the rules around asylum seekers being able to work. Linked to this, we have signed a joint letter to the government urging our leaders to work together to protect lives, not to put them at risk. This will be an ongoing debate. Do let me know if you have views.

The AGM was well attended — thank you to all who came along to support it. The current trustees were re-elected. Our rules also allow us to co-opt trustees onto the board. We are very keen to recruit a trustee to be our link for safeguarding matters. Thankfully, and with the careful work of the Management Team, we have faced very few safeguarding issues over the years. However, as a charity that works with vulnerable adults and children, we do need someone for this role. It should not be onerous. Again, do let me know if you are interested or can suggest someone we can approach.

This is my first newsletter article. It seems like a good time to say thank you to everyone involved in Malvern Welcomes — our volunteers, supporters, those who donate, trustees and many others.

Dan Herbert, Chair of Malvern Welcomes
dan.herbert@malvernwelcomes.net



A love of books — reading and wellbeing

I am sure that many of you will be familiar with the Oscar Wilde quotation below, which is one of my favourites. For the moment at least, all law-abiding UK citizens can cherish their freedom from tyranny and torture. As part of Malvern Welcomes and other organisations, they can also do their best to protect and be neighbourly to those individuals who are seeking sanctuary. For me books can offer a pathway towards a feeling of calm and positive wellbeing: a way to relax, reduce stress and to escape.

Gloriously coloured and sweet-smelling wildflowers abound throughout Worcestershire — and those in parks and other people's front gardens are freely accessible to all of us. Cloud cover permitting, the reliability of the imposing moon in all its phases is available to gaze at in wonder throughout the year. But finding and feasting on beautifully illustrated books can require a bit more work.

Let me explain how I try to make it a bit easier. I run a project that aims to give people of all ages, particularly children, the chance to relish real books as a small way to improve individual mental health and hopefully help to build a cultured and aesthetically-aware society. In a world that is becoming increasingly dominated by screens, the pleasurable sensory experience of handling books is in danger of being reduced and even lost for many children and their parents. I regularly visit schools, nurseries and other community settings to share some of my personal collection — although it is always very difficult to make a selection that won't weigh me down!

*With freedom, flowers, books
and the moon, who could not be
perfectly happy?* Oscar Wilde



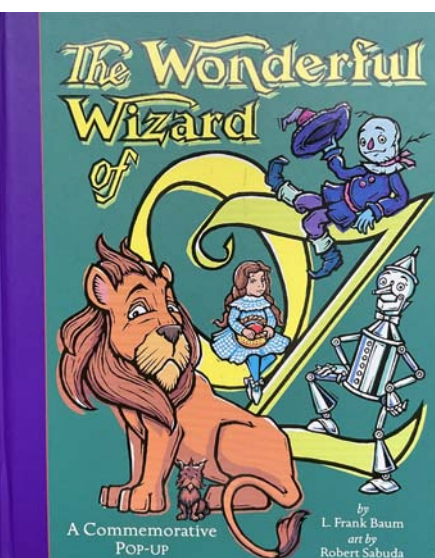
Beautiful Books Build Brilliant Brains

I often give my school presentations the title '*Beautiful Books Build Brilliant Brains*' to convey the excitement and long-term educational value of reading. I am an ex-teacher, but I avoid giving my sessions a 'literacy' tag, instead emphasising the importance of 'literature', which can sadly get a bit lost in the current curriculum. I hope that children, staff and sometimes parents will be infected by my own enthusiasm, particularly for illustrated books.

The school day is always jam-packed, but I usually ask for a slot between 45mins and 1hr to give everyone the chance to focus on the design of individual books. This includes an appreciation of how the content is carefully unfolded from the front cover, through the decorative papers at the beginning all the way to the end papers and back cover. We spend time looking at different illustrative styles and explore how the pictures work with the text to convey atmosphere, fully rounded characters and information. Taking time to look very closely at a page

is obviously visually stimulating but handling beautiful books is a multisensory experience, particularly if publishers use different textured effects and complex paper engineering.

I often use pop-up books, such as *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum, illustrated by Robert Sabuda, to demonstrate astounding illustrations



that complement the text in really innovative ways. Before opening the first page, I usually warn children to refrain from verbally exclaiming a reaction. This is because the loud response from an awe-inspired class of 30 can be overwhelming. Instead, I ask them to react with a suitable facial expression, which usually ranges from open-mouthed surprise to ecstasy!

Using wordless books

I sometimes focus on using a range of wordless books such as *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan to emphasise how skilfully-drawn illustrations can tell a powerful and satisfying story. I find that this is a wonderful way for parents whose first language is other than English to share a book using their preferred language with their child. I have worked with many groups of parents using this method and always get very positive feedback. They often comment that they loved the chance to linger over the pages and to look at the detail together. There is no pressure to decipher written text, just to immerse themselves in the stunning artwork and to thoroughly enjoy the experience.

If I was a doctor, I would prescribe a regular and varied diet of beautifully illustrated books to improve overall health and wellbeing. If this could be experienced in a moonlit, fragrantly scented garden in a free country — all the better.

Karen Argent, volunteer and
Director of The Letterpress Project



Yoga classes for women

©Julia Bracewell

One of the wellbeing activities supported by Malvern Welcomes is a regular yoga class for women. The idea for the class came after a conversation with a resettled family member who had some health issues and wanted to do some more exercise. Some of the Malvern Welcomes volunteers practise yoga and have personally experienced its positive benefits. There are now a number of organisations across the UK that offer yoga classes to support refugees and are developing an evidence base to show the benefits these classes can have on women.

With the support of an experienced and well-respected local yoga teacher, Hilly Hannken, a safe room that could be a 'woman only' space for the duration of the class was found. Hilly generously gives her time for free and Malvern Welcomes pays for the room hire from donations to the charity. This means the weekly class is free for women to attend.

Each class is carefully planned to support the women's wellbeing and physical health. Hilly gently encourages everyone to move slowly into different yoga positions and think about their breathing as they stretch. Yoga practice can teach people to be mindful of their breath and to calm the nervous system, which in turn can calm the mind. This can be a valuable skill for women who may be facing day-to-day challenges supporting their families as they settle in Malvern.

I met six of the women who attend the class. Talking to them, it quickly became clear how important the class is. Women talked about how they felt relaxed, how the

class was a time when they didn't think about anything else and how at the end of a class they had more energy. One woman said she '*can be an angry person, but the class helped her to calm down*'. Another said the class was '*helping her shoulder*' and showed the group how much movement she now had. Her daughter said how the class and their daily walks were very good for their health.

Ruth, who coordinates the class, said '*Yoga has also been an opportunity for the women to learn new English words. The women are from different countries and between them speak five languages, but we always find that we can communicate through gestures and interpreting for one another. The classes provide an important chance to meet up with each other and socialise. We have fun and there are always a lot of giggles.*'

Hilly commented '*It's a privilege for me to share yoga, especially with these women. Even on days when things may be feeling challenging, we manage to support each other with breathing, moving, mindfulness and relaxation.*' Everyone talked about how special the group has been to them.

For more information about all the classes Hilly runs in the Malvern area, please visit www.hilly-yoga.co.uk and for more information about how you can support the work of Malvern Welcomes, see page 19.

Kate Gant, volunteer



'Health and wellbeing start from within'

Noorah el Bay, volunteer

Sport and wellbeing — a personal story

Since my childhood I have loved sports in general such as football, basketball and many other sports. When I was 16 years old I met a bodybuilding and weightlifting coach. He suggested that I go to the gym and train in weightlifting. I loved that very much and it became one of my hobbies. When I came to the UK, after a period of time, Malvern Welcomes helped me to get to know the local gyms.

When I go to the gym I feel very happy, especially the people there are very kind and help me a lot when I need anything. Being in a wheelchair, they always ask me if I need anything — 'Ask us'. They are very good, and I hope to continue doing this. I also have a goal to compete in the Paralympics as a weightlifter.

I hope to achieve my goal. I wish everyone the best of luck.

Abdullah Tamo, volunteer and family member



Food and wellbeing

As we are all aware, food has the means of uniting us, connecting us to our families and cultures and reminding us of the comforting feeling of home. Food can also bring back memories associated with childhood and food prepared, perhaps by a grandmother, with all those feelings of warmth and love.

For many, however, the precious right of home and security is not an option. We see it daily on our television screens. For those who have reached the safety of a new country, feeling safe physically and emotionally is the prime need and then comes the homemaking: centred inevitably on the kitchen, finding the ingredients to recreate the meals from home and establishing the comforts of a home in the new environment.

In the UK, as well as having signature dishes from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we have long welcomed and enjoyed the foods of other countries and cultures: Indian food with curries, Chinese and Italian (hard to remember a time before pizzas and pasta!) amongst others and cooking programmes are popular viewing. It is, of course, basic in every culture that we choose to share meals: preparing food and enjoying company around the family table.

At Malvern Welcomes, a popular feature has been the 'Bring and Share' lunches. These are a chance to connect with new friends and families and enjoy the flavours and textures from recipes brought from home countries to new homes. Connecting with others through food is the nourishment of the soul and the body — and it's fun! Good food, good company and great memories, and a chance for all of us to learn about each other, our cultures and traditions and to share meals that bring comfort. It is part of the social bonding, being part of a community and contributing to personal health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing is defined as a combination of physical, mental, emotional and social health factors — how one feels about oneself and one's family. Preparing food and eating together enhances all of those.

Jean Bryant, volunteer

Recipes to try

Mshat — Palestinian cauliflower and cumin fritters with mint yoghurt

Serves 4-6 (makes 10-12 fritters)

- 1 small cauliflower, cut into 4-5 cm sized florets (300g)
- 120g plain flour
- 20g parsley, finely chopped
- 1 onion, finely chopped (100g)
- 2 eggs
- 1½ tsp ground cumin
- ¾ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- ½ tsp Aleppo chilli flakes (or ¼ tsp regular chilli flakes)
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 250ml sunflower oil to fry.

Sauce (optional)

- 250g Greek-style yoghurt
- ½ tsp dried mint
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp olive oil

Method

Sauce Place all the ingredients in a bowl with ½ tsp salt. Mix and keep in the fridge until ready to serve.

In a pan full of boiling salted water, simmer the cauliflower for four minutes, drain and retain three or four tbsp of the cooking water. Slightly crush the cauliflower with a fork. Put in a bowl with all fritter ingredients, plus salt and black pepper to taste. Add three tbsp of the cooking water and mix well, to the consistency of a slightly runny batter.

Put the oil in a large frying pan (about 22cm) and heat the oil. Once very hot, carefully spoon 2-3 tbsp of batter per fritter into the oil. No more than 3 fritters at a time. Fry for about four minutes flipping over until both sides are golden-brown. Transfer to a plate lined with kitchen paper while the remaining batches are cooked. Serve warm with the yoghurt sauce on the side.

Ugandan tea

I first met R on a very cold January day. We shared tips about how best to keep warm. Mine was a hot water bottle and hers was this wonderful warming tea.

- 1 Ugandan tea bag (can use black tea)
- ½ tsp of lemon grass extract
- ¼ tsp black pepper powder
- 5 cloves of green cardamom seeds
- African ginger (could be substituted with 'root ginger' but not quite the same!)

Add them all together in the water and cook on the stove until it boils then you can enjoy afterwards.

Kate Gant, volunteer

Migrateful

Migrateful is an award-winning website that supports migrants and refugees on their journey to integration by enabling them to teach cookery classes to the general public.

Find out more at
www.migrateful.org

Immersion in the natural world

©Julia Bracewell

"Wow, it's been such a lovely and peaceful day in the woods."

This was an emailed comment to one of our volunteers from a member of a resettled family after a shared picnic at 'Old Hills'. The mother talked about how she enjoyed sitting underneath the trees, finding a quiet spot, listening to birds, playing ball games with the children, feeling relaxed and enjoying the fresh air.

Walk on the Malvern Hills at the weekend and you will not be alone. It seems more and more people are heading for the hills, particularly since the COVID lockdowns — and I'm sure many will go home feeling all the better for it. The fresh air, the distant views, the sense of achievement when you get to the Beacon trig point. There is also a chance to sit and watch birds soaring in the thermals above the peaks, see myriad bees and butterflies feeding on an array of wildflowers, and interact with likeminded walkers immersed in the tranquillity of this very English of landscapes.

It is widely accepted that connecting with nature can enhance our wellbeing: physically, mentally and spiritually, and there is much research to back this up.

Even simple interactions such as feeding birds, walking in the local park or sitting on a beach can make a difference. For me, walking through a woodland, sitting silently on a grassy patch or watching a slowly meandering stream will make me feel more relaxed. Nature helps me to put things into perspective and that increases my resilience.

Research studies have shown that it is this connection with nature rather than knowledge-based activities that can have a positive effect on our mental health. For many years I worked in environmental education and saw firsthand the joy in a child's face when they caught a dragonfly nymph or a water boatman while pond dipping or glimpsed the iridescent blue of a kingfisher. For young people coping with stress or anxiety, better to watch the antics of a bee feeding inside a foxglove 'trumpet' than study the parts of a flower; better to catch sticklebacks with a jam jar than understand the mechanics of stream erosion; and better to build a woodland den than learn the names of trees.

©Julia Bracewell



A good dose of gardening

Gardening provides another opportunity to find enjoyment, exercise and a sense of wellbeing — as well as a source of fresh food of course. Herefordshire-based celebrity gardener, Monty Don, someone who has struggled with depression, has frequently talked about the importance of gardening in terms of his own wellbeing: *'We know that gardening is good for you. It is fantastic, all-round exercise. It inculcates high levels of wellbeing. That is undeniable.'*

Gardening is popular with many of the resettled families supported by Malvern Welcomes. One of the family members talked about how her dad had said that this year all the vegetables he grew 'went so well and they all taste so delicious'. She said that this is not only because there had been more sun this year but also because her dad 'spends a lot of time at the allotment to water the plants and to clean around them, so everything ended up so well.' — and here are some photos to prove it (top).

Another family talked about the enjoyment of beekeeping: 'I keep bees, and I really enjoy it. The bees give me honey, but they also help my garden by pollinating the plants. Because of them, my fruit, vegetables and flowers grow better. The bees get food from the flowers, and in return they help my garden thrive. It's a simple and natural cycle that makes me feel closer to nature.'



The challenges and a call for action

For some people, there can be challenges to venturing onto the Malvern Hills or walking in the local park. There can be a feeling of insecurity or apprehension, a feeling of standing out amongst other users, a feeling of not being welcome. There are some practical ways to help address this. Specialist groups such as [Muslim Hikers](#), in the West Midlands, provide opportunities for people to walk in the countryside, connect with nature and develop a sense of belonging. These also include women-only groups such as [Black Girls Hike](#). Unfortunately, there are few events locally. That does not stop the setting up of a group in this area to create accessible and welcoming walking opportunities for people of all cultural backgrounds. Is there someone or group of people willing to take on this challenge?

A fear of dogs can also be a barrier to walking in the countryside, and we should be considering ways of helping to support people with such a fear. One of the resettled family members talked about how she sees dogs only as fierce guard dogs that should be chained up to protect property. The idea of dogs as pets was not one with which she was familiar. How can we help with such a fear?

Excitement and beauty

One of our greatest naturalists, Sir David Attenborough, has frequently talked of the importance of nature and wellbeing. At the age of 99, and still having a presence on screen, he is undoubtedly a perfect advert for the benefits of spending time in nature: *'It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.'* Sir David Attenborough

Hilary Macmillan, volunteer

Off to the beach...

©Julia Bracewell

Beaches have long been connected with wellbeing — with relaxation, fitness and healing. Who wouldn't wish for a house with a sea view? It may not be the Caribbean or the Mediterranean, but Barry Island is popular. It has all the elements for an enjoyable and relaxing family day out: a safe, sandy beach, cafés... and, if needed, shelter from the rain (much used on past visits!).

This year the sun shone — a bonus for the resettled families who joined Malvern Welcomes volunteers for a great day out. It was glorious this year, according to Ruth Forecast who organised the trip. 'The beach was very busy and diverse with a wonderful festive atmosphere.'

A huge thank you to Carol and Carlo who drove the Community Action minibus. Without their generous help, the trip would not have been possible.

Some feedback from family members

'I have fond memories of the trip to Barry, and I had a great time. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who was part of the team and helped. I am very happy to live in Malvern. Thank you for everything.'

'It was such a wonderful day. I really enjoyed the weather — it made getting into the sea even better. Barry Island is such a great place to visit and perfect for taking some amazing pictures.'

'It was a great trip, everything was beautiful and coordinated and the timing of the trip was great because it was a beautiful sunny day — it will remain a beautiful day in my memory.'

©Julia Bracewell

The importance of music to me

Since my childhood, I dreamed of playing a musical instrument such as the bouzouki, guitar or oud, but I did not own any musical instrument due to my living conditions. When I came to Malvern, after a while, an organisation bought me a guitar. After that, I met Rob, a musician. I never knew how to play the guitar, but he encouraged me, saying of course it's difficult at first but keep at it.

I'm Kurdish and Rob suggested that we learn how to play Kurdish songs, although this is tricky because of the difference between eastern and western music. Luckily for me, I had a very intelligent teacher who did not find any musical culture difficult, and thus I learned to play some Kurdish songs, also western ones such as 'Summertime' and even 'Football Crazy'.

I would like to thank Rob and his wife Alison very much for their help with music and welcoming me to their home. I hope one day I can return their favours to me.

Abdullah Tamo, volunteer and family member

A message from Rob

Abdullah and I met a few years ago with the idea of me showing him some things on the guitar. We also explored tunes on a keyboard and most recently a Celtic harp, which work quite well once you get into a Phrygian mode. Sometimes he brings me a Kurdish song on his phone and once we dished up Happy Birthday and sent it back to a party in Iraq.

We enjoy making music together. Abdullah likes to sing, and I like to hear him. And why wander through these tonescapes? Because they can be beautiful and healing. It's a challenge to fit a Kurdish tune, with its sometime quarter tones, to a guitar with its western scale, but when it comes off we both go away happy. Thank you, Abdullah.

Robin Broadbank, volunteer

Editor's note The Phrygian mode is commonly used in flamenco and eastern music.

Stock Photo ©pexels-artempodrez-468019



Wellbeing in the workplace

The link between employment and wellbeing is well documented: work can provide an important way for people to find a sense of purpose, meaning and fulfilment in life as well as to achieve financial security. Employment can thus play a role in helping refugees to rebuild their lives in the UK and to integrate into their local communities.

Over the past six years, volunteers from Malvern Welcomes have supported a number of refugee families who have resettled in Malvern through the Government's Community Sponsorship Scheme and through other schemes coordinated by the County Council and refugee agencies. Those who arrive under these schemes are given Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) and have a full right to work in the UK in any job, at any skill level and for any employer without restrictions.

As people settle in Malvern and become proficient in English, they naturally seek to use their existing skills and qualifications to find employment and to support their families. There is an electrician, a tiler, a chef, a lawyer, teachers and people who have worked in security as translators. Other family members have had to leave university before completing their degrees or never had an opportunity to gain employment after completing their degree.

Regardless of their enthusiasm now and their work history in their home country, people have found it very difficult to gain permanent work in Malvern and surrounding areas. Initially this may have been because of language barriers and levels of understanding of work-based English. An important aspect of our work in Malvern Welcomes is to provide English teaching and also to assist individuals in their studies for work-based qualifications such as Health and Safety. It is to their credit that some are now working in suitable jobs having reached the necessary level of English and passed the required tests. However, for others, despite working hard to develop their spoken and written skills and to overcome communication barriers, finding steady and appropriate employment remains very challenging.

People often say that they feel that they have been overlooked for jobs, and applications are rejected. In some cases, this is because professional qualifications and work experience from their home countries are not recognised in the UK. Pressure from the Job Centre often means that people feel under pressure to take any job going, rather than investing time in getting UK-accredited qualifications. They find themselves forced to start in lower-paid, lower-skilled work, regardless of previous experience. In turn, this can result in low self-esteem and contribute to low levels of confidence.



The UK job market can be very competitive, particularly in sectors with low wages or high demand. If family members do get lower skilled or manual work, they tend to be offered hourly contracts with little job security. This transient work makes it even harder for people to feel as if they are part of a team. Upskilling is a difficult proposition in the context of irregular shift patterns and sudden requests for work. This, combined with challenging economic times for businesses, can mean people have no, or sporadic, work.

Volunteers from Malvern Welcomes have been supporting people to find work in many different ways. These include developing CVs to include the valuable skills and personal qualities that they bring from their home countries and from the situations they have faced. These skills include resilience, creativity and problem solving. We support people by finding job leads, preparing for interviews and navigating the UK job market.

We have suggested to several people that volunteering is an excellent way to gain work experience. Although this would not be something which would be done in their home country, many have been willing to do this and have enthusiastically volunteered with the Malvern Cube, a toddler group, a primary school, the Malvern Hills Repair Cafe and local Charity Shops. Volunteering can also be a way to network with potential employers but this approach to finding work takes time and can be very frustrating.

The challenges which resettled people face in finding suitable employment are observed by Welcome groups throughout the UK and are not exclusive to the Malvern area. We are very aware that people with refugee status who have the right to work need more help to integrate into the workplace. Additionally, we have found that poor and unreliable public transport can be a serious challenge when getting a job. It is not unusual for people to have to get the first train from Malvern to Worcester or Droitwich to make sure they are in time to start an early shift. To help with this, Malvern Welcomes have supported family members to pass their UK driving tests, thus giving them the possibility of becoming more independent once they are able to buy a car so that they can travel to more rural locations for work.

There are now several aspirational young people whom we are especially keen to support as they move into Further and Higher Education and look to start a career. To further this, we are exploring the development of a Malvern Welcomes volunteer mentoring scheme which would link up family members with local community members or business leaders who have specific knowledge of the type of work they are interested in. We are particularly interested in recruiting volunteers with experiences of practical trades, the retail sector, and health and social care.

Kate Gant, volunteer

If you are interested in volunteering with Malvern Welcomes, please contact

Annette de la Cour

annette.delacour@malvernwelcomes.net

or **Karen Argent**

karen.argent@malvernwelcomes.net



Teaching and learning English

The progress made in ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) by resettled individuals and families in Malvern is life transforming and a testament to their commitment to learning, studying, employment, becoming part of the local and wider community and to contributing to the society and country that has welcomed them. With the arrival of resettled families Malvern is a better place; the UK is a better place and the very opposite of an 'Island of Strangers' — an unacceptable description which feeds the anti-migrant narrative gripping the country with alarming pace and intensity.

After much hard work in preparing for and passing the UK Citizenship Test, which tests English language level and knowledge of British society, history, and laws, several families are now British citizens. Ironically, few British from birth would pass the knowledge section! As British citizens, adults can now vote in elections, stand for public office, and travel on British passports. We celebrate with and congratulate each family on this important milestone. The resettled families who now have British citizenship were able to apply for it after five years' residency in the UK. However, the government announced in its May White Paper, the proposal to extend residency to ten years before being able to apply for citizenship. Subsequent proposals are that settlement could be 'earned' and entitlement to apply extended to a 15-to-20-year wait. These proposals are unfair and such public deliberations extremely unsettling for those families who don't yet have citizenship.

The UK Citizenship Test is extremely difficult, requiring detailed knowledge about Britain and currently a proficient level of English at B1/intermediate. So it was with dismay that the ESOL teaching community learned of the

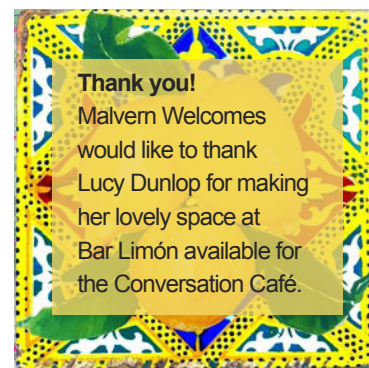
government's intention to increase the language level requirement to B2. The ESOL sector has been deprived of funding for almost two decades. There

is already insufficient ESOL provision across England and yet no reference to increased government funding was made in the May White Paper. Neither does the proposal to require a higher level of English take into consideration how trauma effects and impedes learning or that, having been pushed into precarious employment too soon and often working more than one job, there isn't sufficient time

or stability to commit to regular accredited ESOL classes. Those with caring responsibilities also cannot attend classes. Given the already dire ESOL situation across the country, it is particularly important that Malvern Welcomes continues to provide English classes to families and individuals who resettle locally (whether through refugee resettlement schemes or with a status of seeking asylum or having humanitarian protection).

Conversation Café

Because most families are now generally busy with work, study and volunteering, the Conversation Café is currently held monthly. It provides an opportunity for learners to practise speaking English and to socialise with other members of our community. It is also an important 'surgery' where volunteers support attendees with a myriad of day-to-day living tasks that, increasingly, must be managed online and for which a high level of English is required. In the coming months we will reassess whether the Conversation Café should be held more frequently.



Thank you

After seven years the Eden Centre has closed its English classroom doors, so Malvern Welcomes would like to thank the inspiring and visionary Jan Watts, who set up and ran the centre's English language programme, and her committed team of teachers. The Eden Centre programme and social hub it created have been instrumental in changing the lives and chances of so many non-native English speakers in our community. It has been an absolute pleasure working with Jan over the years; she is and will always be a cherished friend of the Malvern Welcomes community.

Malvern Welcomes is very fortunate to have its own excellent team of qualified teachers, and we thank them for their continued commitment and motivation. Each teacher's hard work is evident in the hard work and progress of their students and an essential contribution to how lives are being transformed so positively through English teaching and learning.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who donates to Malvern Welcomes and without whose generosity the ESOL Programme couldn't function.

Sharon Baker, volunteer and ESOL coordinator

If you are interested in joining the Malvern Welcomes ESOL team, and are a qualified ESOL teacher, please contact

Annette de la Cour

annette.delacour@malvernwelcomes.net

or **Karen Argent**

karen.argent@malvernwelcomes.net

What's been happening in 2025?

Each year sees an increase in the numbers of families and individuals supported by Malvern Welcomes. In total, over the last few years, four families have been resettled in Malvern under the UK Home Office Community Sponsorship scheme, with a further eight families arriving via the County Council or other authorities. One of these families moved away to join their extended family elsewhere in the UK, while another is fully independent. This leaves ten families who continue to receive support at some level. In addition to these families, there are a few individuals who have been referred to us by other organisations or have contacted us directly, meaning that we have supported around 50 individuals over the past year.

Stories of success

Three of the established families have now achieved British Citizenship and are becoming increasingly independent. Three young people are at university — Malvern Welcomes assisted with their applications and with obtaining student finance. Four adults have been on vocational courses and four young people are at college with one now seeking an apprenticeship. There has been an increase in the number of people passing the driving test and in gaining employment and voluntary posts.

Community sponsorship

The fourth community sponsorship family was welcomed more than 18 months ago and there was much to celebrate at the annual Home Office review, with the two eldest daughters at university and the youngest now successfully placed and thriving at a school where her complex needs are well catered for.

Employment

As you will have already read, an employment support group has been established, recognising employment as a very significant barrier for families.

Events

Malvern Welcomes continues to facilitate the regular annual events that have become a social focus for the families and individuals we support, including the annual seaside trip and picnic. Both these events include 'bring and share' food which is popular with all participants.

If you are interested in volunteering and would like to talk more about opportunities with Malvern Welcomes, please contact

Annette de la Cour

annette.delacour@malvernwelcomes.net

or **Karen Argent**

karen.argent@malvernwelcomes.net



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How Malvern Welcomes uses its funds

We use our funds wisely and carefully and are grateful to our dedicated team of volunteers, English teachers and trustees who give their support generously on an unpaid basis.

Some of the many ways in which we use donations and funds are as follows.

- **Transport to medical appointments and hospital**

Appointments are often at hospitals outside Malvern which are difficult to reach by public transport. Enabling people to attend medical appointments is a vital part of our work.

- **Community Sponsorship — resettling families**

Malvern Welcomes has resettled some families under a contract with the UK Home Office through the Community Sponsorship scheme. This requires us to furnish and equip a house or flat, transport the family to Malvern and demonstrate evidence of having financial reserves.

- **Grants towards driving lessons**

Learning to drive in the UK is an important step towards gaining employment, especially when living in Malvern from where it is often difficult to reach places by public transport. We offer a partial grant towards driving lessons.

- **Grants towards school uniforms**

For children starting a new school, uniform is an expensive item. We offer a grant towards this so that when a young person attends school they are dressed appropriately and are well equipped.

- **Contributions toward citizenship applications**

The cost of applying for UK Citizenship is prohibitive. When a family member has reached the stage where they are able to make an application, we offer a contribution towards this.

- **Administration costs**

We keep these to a minimum. Essential administrative costs include the Zoom account, insurance and some professional accounting services.

- **English learning materials and textbooks**

Teaching English is a vital part of our work in supporting people on their path to independence.

Ruth Forecast, volunteer

Donations

Please visit www.malvernwelcomes.org/ and click on the Donate button. You can also send a cheque to the address below.

112 Worcester Road
Malvern Link
WR14 1SS



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Thank You!

Malvern Welcomes would like to acknowledge and thank every individual, group and organisation that donates to the work we are doing. Without your generous contributions we could not support the resettled families we have welcomed into our community or raise awareness of the very real and difficult challenges refugees face across the world.

Thank you for every pound you donate to Malvern Welcomes.

Thank you also for every gesture of kindness you make to support refugees and make them feel welcomed within our community and beyond.

A special thank you to Jim Morris for allowing us to use his artwork in this newsletter at no charge. More of Jim's work can be found at: jimmorrisart.info/

We are also extremely grateful to Julia Bracewell for designing this newsletter free of charge. Thank you, Julia.

Contact Information

Membership

If you would like to support Malvern Welcomes by becoming a member, please visit

www.malvernwelcomes.org/how-can-i-help/become-a-member-2/ and complete the membership form.

You may also email info@malvernwelcomes.net for membership information or write to the address below.

Volunteering

If you are interested in volunteering and would like to talk more about opportunities with Malvern Welcomes, please contact Karen Argent or Annette de la Cour:

annette.delacour@malvernwelcomes.net
karen.argent@malvernwelcomes.net

General enquiries

Email info@malvernwelcomes.net

If you prefer to write, please send your enquiry to:
Malvern Welcomes
c/o Malvern Community Action
112 Worcester Road
Malvern Link
WR14 1SS

