

TRANSFORMATIVE



CONVERSATIONS

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# REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

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## **Local Salvation Army settings are finding their communities divided, particularly when it comes to issues surrounding migration and the UK asylum system.**

Some Salvation Army centres, volunteers and service users have been victims of verbal abuse and harmful social media posts as a direct consequence of responding to the needs of people seeking asylum in their area. Others have had volunteers and service users leave due to feeling intimidated by large numbers of newcomers arriving at their settings unexpectedly.

People connected to The Salvation Army hold a wide range of views on migration, asylum, and the associated protests and policies - for a whole host of reasons. If we want to bring about peace and reconciliation in our communities, there needs to be dialogue. How do we have constructive conversations about these issues when we have such a diversity of strong opinions in our settings?

This resource presents a curated list of existing media which encourage us to consider the experiences of others - in this case refugees and asylum seekers. By exploring these together, we can have a deeper appreciation of:

- the experiences others have been through
- how these experiences affect the choices people make
- how they affect the views people have

The purpose of all this is more empathetic listening - a key starting point for transformative conversations.



## How to Use This Resource

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**On the following pages, you will find a series of suggested questions, followed by links to a range of media. Feel free to be creative in how and where you use these, and wise in selecting materials that are relevant for your setting and your community's needs. Why not explore a range of different views as experienced through these media – particularly exploring stories which may be different from the viewers' own experiences.**



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## Here are six suggestions of how you could use these materials in different settings:

- 🗣️ **Use alone:** You could use some elements as a prompt in personal discipleship or to help guide personal prayer. For example, the app game *Bury Me, My Love* could be an ongoing prompt to pray for the changing situations displaced people encounter along their journey.
- 🗣️ **Use in a Bible study:** You could use media from the list alongside the faith-based questions below to help put biblical themes into a modern context. For example, how could you compare/contrast Ruth and Naomi's experience of welcome with that of Yusra and Sara after their arrival in Germany in *The Swimmers*, or Yara's arrival in County Durham in *The Old Oak*?
- 🗣️ **Use in Sunday worship:** You could use some of the suggested media as a prompt for reflection. For example, you might use the short video from Save the Children as an aid to reflection on a story of forced displacement in the Bible, and how this may have impacted the people in those situations. Just be mindful of your congregation (especially if there are children present) in choosing what to share.
- 🗣️ **Use with a community group:** There may be opportunities to use the materials to support work with community groups associated with the corps. For example, the *My (Refugee) Life* documentary may be appropriate for use with Employment Plus groups considering potential barriers to employment and how these may be overcome.
- 🗣️ **Use with a youth/children's group:** Not all the materials would be appropriate for children and young people. However, many would - for example, the illustrated book of Brian Bilston's poem 'Refugees' could be a helpful way of introducing opposing views of welcome, and a starting point for reflecting on what a Christian position may be.
- 🗣️ **Use in a dedicated event:** There may be opportunities for one-off events, focused on a specific issue. For example, the Greater Manchester Asylum Hotels Group statement may be a helpful document to include as a focus in a prayer event considering the experience of newcomers to the UK and how the Church may intercede.



## Questions

Here are some questions which you may want to use in conjunction with the suggested media. The aim is to help facilitate transformative conversations. You will need to use your judgement, knowing your group, as to whether all may be appropriate for your setting.

### Faith-related questions

**A. What Bible passages do you think may be relevant to this media?**

*An opportunity to integrate Scripture into the conversation. Try to see the Bible passages as having a 'dialogue' with what you have just experienced. What elements would the Bible challenge, what elements would it support, and how might it present a completely different view?*

**B. What does our faith say about this topic? How might that differ from what non-Christians might say?**

*Encourages people to explore this from a uniquely Christian perspective. Try to examine the specifics of a faith response rather than adopting the general view of the society you live in - how does Christianity go beyond the 'sides' our society gets split into?*

**C. Consider Jesus' example of radical hospitality. How might he have responded to the people or situations represented in the media?**

*This question encourages us to reflect on the life and teaching of Jesus, and particularly his well-documented inclusion of marginalised individuals. Who in the media might he have been pleased with? What may have saddened him? How might he have responded differently?*

**D. Where can we find God in this? What is the Spirit saying to us here today?**

*Try to move beyond abstract conversation. How is God using the conversation you are having? What might the Spirit be saying to you as individuals and a group? What will your response be?*



## Questions (Continued)

### General questions

**1. How did the media you have just experienced make you feel?**

*A question to help people begin paying attention to their feelings and how they have responded.*

**2. What is one good reason the country should AND one good reason they shouldn't support the main character(s)/people in the media you have just experienced?**

*This question helps people feel comfortable expressing their views, even if they differ from other people.*

**3. How do you think the main character(s)/people in the media you have just experienced felt? What was a time you felt like that?**

*This question encourages the building of empathy with the people discussed/represented in the media.*

**4. If you had been through the experience of the character(s)/people in the media, how do you think that might have shaped your opinions?**

*This question helps people to consider how the life experiences of another person may influence and shape their worldview.*

**5. Some people say the main character(s)/people in the media [insert doubt/concern here]. How might you respond to them?**

*This question helps to 'externalise' the discussion by speaking about it in the third person, allowing people to challenge the opinion and express their views without feeling it is personal.*

**6. What did you notice that might lead to integration challenges for the character(s)/people in the media, or that may lead to disintegration in communities?**

*A question to help reflect on how integration can be a two-way street, with people becoming disintegrated and estranged from their communities - leading to isolation and division.*

**7. What 'next step' do you feel compelled to take, after today?**

*A question to encourage people to leave with a concrete, practical action that they can take.*



# Trauma-Informed Approaches

**There may be people in our groups who are themselves from a refugee background or may have had traumatic experiences which mirror those in the media presented.**

Things you can do to help prevent re-traumatisation are:

- 🗣️ **Be transparent:** Let people know what the media you will be exploring together contains. Share major themes or incidents which are represented, and the format of the media (video, poem, game etc) - ideally in advance of the session.
- 🗣️ **Give a choice:** Make sure people know that they can opt out of taking part - either before the session starts or during the session if needed.
- 🗣️ **Moderate conversations sensitively:** When using the questions, try not to encourage the re-telling of traumatic experiences which may be re-traumatising or triggering for another person. If this does happen, try to direct the focus of the discussion to the person's strengths in the situation (for example their resilience, perseverance etc).
- 🗣️ **Consider pastoral care:** Make sure participants know who they can talk to if any of the issues have impacted them and they would like to talk more. Also consider who the facilitator can talk to if they are the one who feels they have been negatively impacted by the session.



## Introduction to the Materials

**The following media may help support understanding of the experiences of refugees newly arrived in the UK. Some of the themes and content in the media may be upsetting for some people and may not be appropriate for certain ages. It is important that the person using these materials with a group views the media in advance so they are aware of any issues it may raise.**





## FILMS

Before showing any film publicly, please make sure that you have the correct licensing in place. Visit the [CCLI website](#) for more information, and speak with the leadership of your corps/centre to ensure that you are correctly covered.

### THE OLD OAK (2023)

Directed by Ken Loach, rated 15

A pub landlord, living in a previously thriving mining community in County Durham, struggles to hold on to his pub and keep it as the one remaining public space where people can meet in the town. Meanwhile, tensions rise when Syrian refugees arrive in the community, but the landlord strikes up a friendship with one of the refugees called Yara.

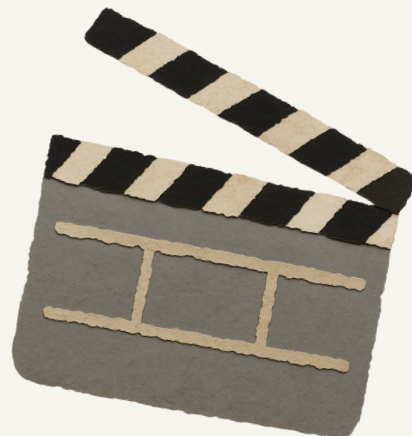
*Themes: community integration/disintegration, divided communities, bereavement, suicide, poverty, refugee experience, respect, charity, empathy*

### THE SWIMMERS (2022)

Directed by Sally El Hosaini, rated 15

The true story of two young sisters called Yusra and Sara who dream of becoming Olympic swimmers, leave war-torn Syria, and embark on a harrowing journey as refugees in an attempt to find safety and a new life for their family in Europe.

*Themes: refugee experience, family, displacement, dangerous journeys, resilience, hope*





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# DOCUMENTARIES

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Before showing any documentary publicly, please make sure that you have the correct licensing in place. Visit the [CCLI website](#) for more information, and speak with the leadership of your corps/centre to ensure that you are correctly covered.

## GO BACK TO WHERE YOU CAME FROM

Produced by [Channel 4](#)

A four-part documentary following a group of six opinionated British people with a range of views on migration, as they take the route of people leaving Somalia and Syria to travel to the UK. They encounter people at various stages of the journey and gain a better understanding of the reality of the refugee experience. Why not work through the whole series over four sessions, book club-style.

*Themes: refugee experience, displacement, dangerous journeys, empathy, polarisation*

## MY (REFUGEE) LIFE

Produced by [Breaking Barriers](#)

A 25-minute documentary exploring the experiences of five refugees living in Britain. The refugees are filmed in their daily life and in interviews exploring why they left their countries of origin, what their living conditions are like, how they find work, and their hopes for the future.

*Themes: refugee experience, asylum accommodation, empathy, work*





## SHORT VIDEOS

### MOST SHOCKING SECOND A DAY VIDEO

Produced by [Save the Children](#)

What would it look like if Britain were attacked and we became refugees? This video explores that possibility through the eyes of a young British girl. Over the course of a year, tensions rise and the family flee for safety. 90 seconds, 1 second a day. There is also a [second video](#) available which continues the girl's story.

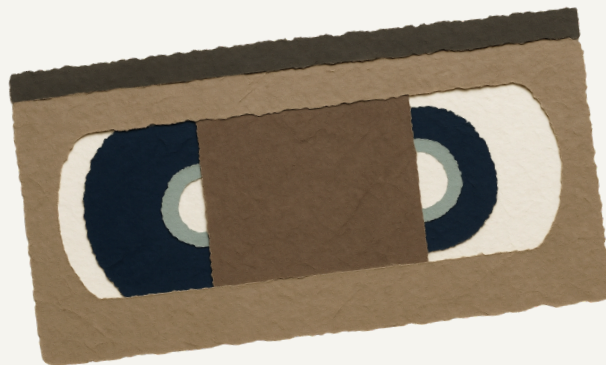
*Themes: refugee experience, children and youth, displacement, conflict, family separation*

### NEW SCOTS

Produced by [Syrian Futures](#)

A series of five short films made by young people originally from Syria who now live in Scotland. They are in a range of styles and share what their experience of settling into the UK has been, both positive and negative, along with their hopes for the future. Each film also has some additional reflection questions, and there is an education pack to support the series.

*Themes: hope for the future, integration, refugee experience, preconceptions, bullying, racism, family separation, resilience, work*





## GAMES

### BURY ME, MY LOVE

Produced by Arte

This is an app game played on a smartphone. It is a fictional story inspired by real people and events and takes the form of a real-time, interactive text conversation between two people affected by the war in Syria and having to leave the country.

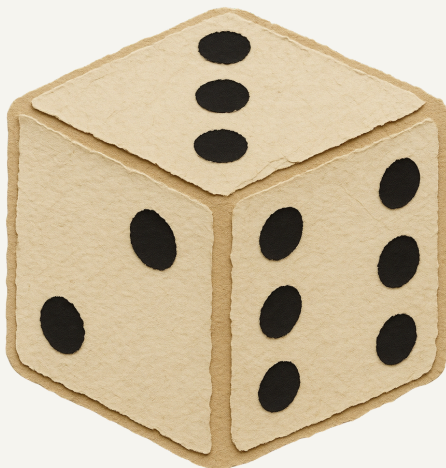
*Themes: refugee experience, displacement, family separation, dangerous journeys, choices*

### PASSAGES

Produced by UNHCR

A game for a group of up to 67 people. If played in full over a three to three-and-a-half-hour period, this game covers ten modules exploring several aspects of the refugee experience. With a full set of handouts and instructions, it is a comprehensive package but will require preparation and reflection on how you will run it in a trauma-informed way.

*Themes: refugee experience, displacement, empathy, choices, dangerous journeys*





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# SHORT WRITING

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## ‘REFUGEES’

Written by Brian Bilston

A poem which presents two views on welcoming refugees when read top-to-bottom or bottom-to-top and challenges us to consider a change in perspective. It is also available as an illustrated children’s book.

*Themes: welcome, stereotypes, empathy*

## STATEMENT

Written by the Greater Manchester Asylum Hotels Group

A piece written by asylum seekers housed in hotels in Manchester explaining their perspective on what asylum hotels are actually like, why they are here, and giving their response to some of the commentary around asylum hotels. It is also available as a video.

*Themes: refugee experience, asylum accommodation, family separation, crime and safety, local community*





[salvationist.org.uk/resources](https://salvationist.org.uk/resources)