

"A child who is protected from all controversial ideas is as vulnerable as a child who is protected from every germ. The infection, when it comes (and it will come) may overwhelm the system, be it the immune system or the belief system."

*Jane Smiley, in the
Chicago Tribune*

A few members haven't renewed their subscriptions yet—only a modest £5! Expect a reminder from our treasurer, Louise Armstrong. Make it easy—pay by standing order!



Congratulations to SH&S committee member Andrew Morrison, who proposed to his partner Angie Wreford while they were on holiday recently, and she said yes!

Refugees—the facts

If you weren't at our meeting on 10th September, look what you missed! There was a disappointingly small turnout to hear our guest speakers, Rebecca Crerar from the Suffolk Refugee Support Forum and Sabah Mamand, a Kurdish volunteer from the forum. It was Sabah's first experience of speaking to a group in English, and he did really well. Despite the small numbers, we were able to give Rebecca over £40 from the raffle for the SRSF grants scheme. She would like members to know how much this was appreciated.

New member Sue Lewis was there, and wrote, "I just wanted to say that I really enjoyed the meeting. Both Sabah and Rachel were very interesting speakers, and those who did not attend missed a treat. What a delightful young man Sabah is, a credit to his family, his country and his culture. And what a shame that our news media do not focus on people like him when reporting about refugees."

The popular perception of refugees, partly due to alarmist tabloid journalism, is that they are mostly here for the wrong reasons, that there are too many of them, and that the UK accepts a larger number in proportion to its population than other countries. The terms "refugee", "asylum seeker", and "migrant worker" are often confused. Rebecca supplied us with some facts.

An asylum seeker is someone who's fleeing persecution in their homeland and has made him or herself known to the authorities. He or she isn't allowed to work, but can claim NASS support (National Asylum Support Service through the Home Office).

A refugee is someone whose asylum application has been successful and has the right to remain in the UK for five years.

The UN Convention of 1951 defines refugees as persons who are outside their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded



Rebecca Crerar and Sabah Mamand

fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. A total of 145 countries have signed the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention.

A refused asylum seeker is someone whose asylum application has been turned down and must return home.

An economic migrant or migrant worker is someone who's moved to another country to work. This applies to EU citizens with work permits.

The world situation is that 67 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced at the end of 2007 (source: UNHCR). This includes: 16 million refugees, 26 million internally displaced persons due to armed conflict, and 25 million internally displaced persons due to natural disasters.

A total of 27,905 people claimed asylum in the UK in 2007. About 27% received some kind of leave to remain. 63,365 people were removed from the UK in 2007, and 49% were refused entry at a port. The rest were forcibly removed or returned under the voluntary returns programme.

The top five countries from which asylum was claimed in 2007 were Afghanistan (2495), Iran (2210), China (2120), Iraq (1835), and Eritrea (1820).

In the East of England, there are currently 70 asylum seekers in Ipswich, 100 in Peterborough, and 100 in Norwich, who

The BHA's Local Development Project

The guest speaker at our October meeting (see diary for date and time) will be Pepper Harow, Local Development Officer at the British Humanist Association, who'll talk about their Local Development Project.

The BHA appealed for individual members (not affiliated groups) to volunteer as local representatives of the BHA, to further the projects' aims. The BHA provides an overview of the project, thus:

The Local Development Project exists because the BHA believes that there is a lack of representation in some areas for humanists and non-religious people. Our experience shows that local authorities communicate with their citizens about diversity, equalities and social cohesion via a complex web of forums, networks and consultations. These feed into higher level organisations eventually reaching national bodies.

At a local level, the non-religious are often left out of this dialogue because of a lack of organised and recognised mechanisms of communication and a lack of resources. In many cases local authorities do not even consider including humanists and non-religious people as they are not considered to have any distinct needs as a group; unlike ethnic minorities or the religious.

However, this leads to a gap in knowledge about humanism at local level and exclusion of humanists and non-religious people from decision making bodies. It can also lead to a lot of support for interfaith work which helps

to add to cohesion between faiths but does not add to dialogue between the religious and the non-religious.

Therefore, the local development project aims to:

- identify how humanists and non-religious people might contribute effectively to the work of equality bodies and networks, including groups which discuss religion and belief issues, within local authority areas
- identify how humanists and the non-religious might engage with relevant local government bodies
- set up and maintain a network of humanists and non-religious people to represent the policies of the BHA in their local area
- represent the views of humanists and the non-religious on bodies which take part in local discourse around religion and belief issues



Pepper Harow

There are differences of opinion about this approach. The National Secular Society takes a very different view about "community cohesion", and our member John Palmer wrote about "people of faith" being invited to join Local Strategic Partnership boards in our May 2008 newsletter:

"What have local strategic partnerships to do with

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Refugees—the facts

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receive NASS support and housing. 215 get just NASS support without housing), and there are about 300 who are at the end of the process or making fresh claims.

Yorkshire and Humber is currently the largest dispersal area in the U.K. Many people believe that the UK holds around 23% of the world's refugees, while the true figure is around 2-3% (Source: Asylum Newsletter, Aug/Sept 2007 on www.refugeeaccess.info).

What can you do? Tell others, make donations, reflect on your own attitude, join campaigns, or become a volunteer.

Websites: www.unhcr.org, www.homeoffice.gov.uk, www.refugeecouncil.org.uk.

Local addresses:

Suffolk Refugee Support Forum, 38 St Matthew's Street, Ipswich. Tel 01473 400785.

Refugee Council, 4-8 Museum Street, Ipswich. Tel 01473 297900.

Sabah's story

Sabah lived and studied in Northern Iraq. He is a Kurd. Iraqi Kurds were persecuted by Saddam Hussein. The chemical attack that killed many Kurds at Halabja on March 16 and 17, 1988, wasn't the only one.

Sabah's father (who died) was a farmer and his mother had a shop. When Sabah was sixteen, his mother arranged for him to stay with an uncle, and from there he was smuggled out of the country to avoid being captured and forcibly enlisted in a military group called the Quds Force, a terrorist organisation that originated in Iran. If he had stayed, Sabah would have been forced to kill fellow Iraqis or be killed himself.

Sabah arrived in Peterborough and was moved to Croydon, where he was interrogated by the authorities. After a spell in Colchester (where he worked on his English), he eventually arrived in Ipswich, where he's a volunteer at the support forum. Sabah would like to return to Iraq when it's safe to do so. Meanwhile, he hopes to go to university to study to be a dentist.

BHA Local Development Project

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humanists and secularists? Here we have an invitation for faith (religious) people to influence local affairs, in their status as religious people. Not as Catholic social workers or Buddhist police officers, but just as religious people. And it gets worse, as a single person is expected to represent all the faiths in his/her area. How rational is that?

"Can secularists accept this invitation as reasonable? Surely adding more people of faith to these boards goes against our view that government should be separated from direct religious influence."

Pepper responded to John's article in our August newsletter, and we invited her to come and tell us why the BHA thinks we should get involved.

Appropriate adults

Anglia Care Trust needs volunteers to act as appropriate adults to give support to young people and vulnerable adults under arrest at Suffolk police stations. Are you available for a few hours each week? You need a mature attitude, patience and an understanding approach to young people and vulnerable adults with mental health problems or learning disabilities. A driving licence and your own transport essential, as you'll be required to visit outlying police stations. Travel expenses paid. Training and ongoing support provided. For more information and an application pack contact:

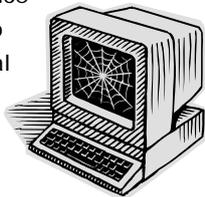
Anglia Care Trust, 65 St Matthews Street, Ipswich, IP1 3EW. Tel. 01473 213140. admin@angliacaretrust.org.uk.

Closing date for applications—Friday 7 November 2008.



In brief ...

There was a **sudden surge in visits to our website** during the week beginning 8th September. An item about the BBC Big Bang Day September 10 website, detailing the experiment in the Large Hadron Collider tunnel at CERN, attracted 902 visits that week. Since then, it's gone up to 1050 visits (the total number of visits is in the tens of 1000s).



The BHA has issued legal proceedings against the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) over their decision not to allow the study of Humanism in a Religious Studies GCSE in the same way as religions are studied. The exam board OCR had included Humanism alongside religions in its proposed GCSE in Religious Studies, announced in April 2008, but a decision by the QCA has meant that it could not be included. If you or one of your family is likely to be affected by this decision, the BHA would like to hear from you.

SH&S Ceremonies Celebrant & group chairperson David Mitchell is applying to become a volunteer **Humanist Chaplain at Ipswich Hospital**.

Margaret Nelson, Suffolk Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education member, expects that it will agree on **guidelines for teachers about Creationism and Intelligent Design in RE lessons** and visiting contributors to RE lessons and assemblies at its meeting on 10 October.

Two members of our committee will attend the BHA's **Groups Annual Meeting** on 15th November in London.

Re-launch of SIFRE's Forum of Faiths

Suffolk Humanists and Secularists have been involved with Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource from its inception in the early '90s. It provided opportunities to contribute to training and education for schools and other statutory and voluntary bodies, ensuring that a Humanist and Secularist viewpoint was expressed to balance religious influences.

However, we've never been happy about being included under the general heading of "faith", since that's the one thing that's anathema to us. It would be preferable to come under the heading of "religion and beliefs", though that wouldn't roll off the tongue as well as "faith" does, in "Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource".

Some of us (myself included) are also unhappy about the increasing tendency for groups like SIFRE to be consulted by local authorities and other bodies, especially since the Government launched its consultation document, "'Face-to-Face and Side-by-Side": A framework for inter faith

dialogue and social action." This is relevant to the sort of thing that Pepper will be talking about at our October meeting (see p2), and what John Palmer wrote about in our May newsletter.

On 22nd October, SIFRE will re-launch its Forum of Faiths. We have two representatives; John and myself. SIFRE announces: "Forum of Faiths Meetings were intended to provide the focus for all of Suffolk's Faith groups to meet together, to get to know each other, to grow in mutual friendship and from time to time examine worldly issues from the viewpoint of faith. The interest of the statutory sector in the views of the faith communities makes it timely to strengthen this aspect of SIFRE's work."

John and I will be at the meeting. I'll be taking copies of the enclosed "Fishing" leaflet, which was originally written by Richard Hogg, a BHA member, and has been tweaked by me. Feel free to use it wherever it's appropriate. MN

SUFFOLK HUMANISTS & SECULARISTS

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The Suffolk & N E Essex Humanist group was founded in 1991 to promote Humanism and Secularism, and to provide fellowship, education and support for non-believers in Suffolk and North East Essex. We changed our name to Suffolk Humanists when the Essex group was formed, then again in April 2008, to reflect the importance of secularism when religious organisations are being increasingly assertive.

We're affiliated to The British Humanist Association, The National Secular Society, and Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource (SIFRE). The group is a member of SAVO—the Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations.

Sympathetic non-members are welcome, but by joining us you'll help us to raise awareness of Humanism and Secularism, and to challenge the increasing influence of religion in public life, the arts and the media.

The Suffolk Humanist Ceremonies Team, which is independent of the BHA network, has an unblemished record for high standards. We provide non-religious ceremonies for all occasions. For more information, see the contact details above.

HUMANISM: an ethical approach to life without religion;

Humanists think we can be good without God.

SECULARISM: the belief that religion should have no place in civil affairs; that the church and state should be kept separate.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Meetings are at Castle Hill Community Centre, Highfield Road, Ipswich, IP1 6DG, from 7.30pm to 10pm. Raffle prizes and guests welcome. For directions or to request or offer a lift, phone 01473 658828 or email us. If you get lost, phone 07901 656463.

Wednesday 8 October, The Hall at Castle Hill Community Centre—**Pepper Harow from the British Humanist Association on its Local Development Project**. The last half hour of the meeting will be a brain-storming session about how to distribute the jobs done by secretary Margaret Nelson, who won't stand for re-election at our AGM next year.

Noon on Saturday 25 October—Pub lunch at The Beagle, Sproughton, near Ipswich. We'll be discussing whether or not we're anti-religious. Phone or email for directions. Look for a copy of the newsletter on a table.

Saturday 8 November, 9.30-12 am—1st workshop in Elmsett for those who'd like to know more about Humanism and Secularism, and about local activism. We'll be looking at "2500 years (or more) of Freethinking", a documentary from the European Humanist Federation. Please let me know by the 3rd if you plan to attend—you'll be expected to come to all the sessions and the meeting on 10 December with Jim Herrick. Tea, coffee and biscuits provided—you're welcome to bring a packed lunch. *MN*

Wednesday 12 November, The Hall at Castle Hill Community Centre—**Julie Coombes, teacher, on RE in the primary school**.

Saturday 22 November, 9.30-12 am—2nd Humanism and Secularism workshop in Elmsett (see previous session). Humanism & Secularism today—a look at the approach adopted by different organisations and the resurgence

of religion in public life, with reference to various publications and websites.

Saturday 6 December, 9.30-12 am—3rd Humanism and Secularism workshop in Elmsett (see previous session). Humanism & Secularism today—what's been happening locally, including Humanist ceremonies. We'll see some of the "Why Atheism?" DVD by Team Video, which includes local school students talking about their atheism, and films of Humanist ceremonies.

Wednesday 10 December, The Hall at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—**Jim Herrick, author of "Humanism: an introduction", on The Humanist Heritage**—a look at the history of Humanism.

January 2009—no meeting in Ipswich.

Saturday 17 January, 9.30-12 am—Final Humanism and Secularism workshop in Elmsett. General discussion about what we've covered in the previous sessions, and the way forward.

Monday 9th February to Saturday 14th February—Darwin Day exhibit at Ipswich Central Library.

Wednesday 11 February 2009, Room 4 at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich—**Ten Minute Topics**.

* **Pub lunches** have proved popular, especially with members who don't usually come to ordinary meetings. If you'd like to arrange one at a pub near you, please do, and we'll publicise it.

* Apart from booking a display case at Ipswich Library for a **Darwin Day** exhibit, we still haven't finalised plans to mark the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth on 12 February, so will have a special meeting in Ipswich in the next few weeks. Please let us know if you're interested.

www.suffolkhands.org.uk