



## Circles of Compassion

MA Photography, Falmouth University  
Final Major Project: Gerard Liston  
Supervisor: Wendy McMurdo  
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## Artist's Statement

Based on the theme for Refugee Week 2023, 'Circles of Compassion' is a collaborative photographic project involving ten people currently seeking asylum who are supported by the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax. Participants represent countries around the globe; from Eritrea to Iran and from Syria to El Salvador.

An initial discussion with each person explored aspects of their lives that bring them a sense of hope and joy. This provided the brief for gathering a collection of images – some taken on a high-quality camera and some gathered from mobile phones – from which two were selected for the portfolio.

The backdrop for this work has been an unfolding series of tragedies in the English Channel; tightening of legislation around migration routes into the UK; racist protests about the location of hotel accommodation and reductive rhetoric from politicians claiming that they will 'Stop the Boats'. 'Circles of Compassion' is a concept that urges us to extend empathy beyond our immediate circle of family, friends, and community.

The words and images presented by this project provide a glimpse into the lives of ten people – ten migrants – who, for many UK residents, live outside their circles of compassion. Yet, their hopes and joys sound remarkably like our own. My aim is to invite an open-minded response to open-hearted sharing by ten refugees and those viewing both the online photobook and the exhibition are invited to share how this project has affected their own sense of empathy and care.

## Image Gallery

- Page 6 A Kurdish style suit tailored by Sabbah (Gerard Liston)
- Page 7 Creating shopping bags from old garments (Gerard Liston)
- Page 8 Two favourite books from Sahand's collection (Gerard Liston)
- Page 10 (Top) After morning worship at King's Church, Halifax (Gerard Liston)
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- Page 23 English writing exercises (Gerard Liston)
- Page 24 Ethiopian coffee ceremony (Gerard Liston)

*'I am 32 years old and I am from Kurdistan, Iran. I started sewing when I was 15 years old. I feel happy when I work.'*

*'At St Augustine's, I am a volunteer in the free clothes shop and I convert old clothes into handbags that can be used again because I feel that by doing this we respect nature.'*

Sabbah

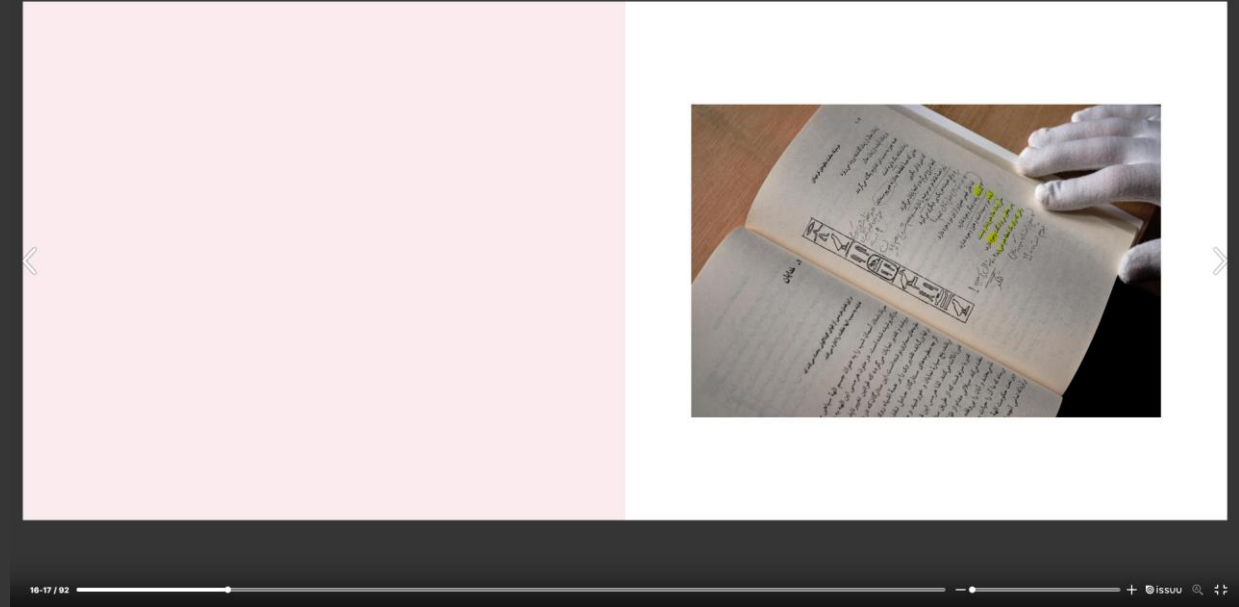
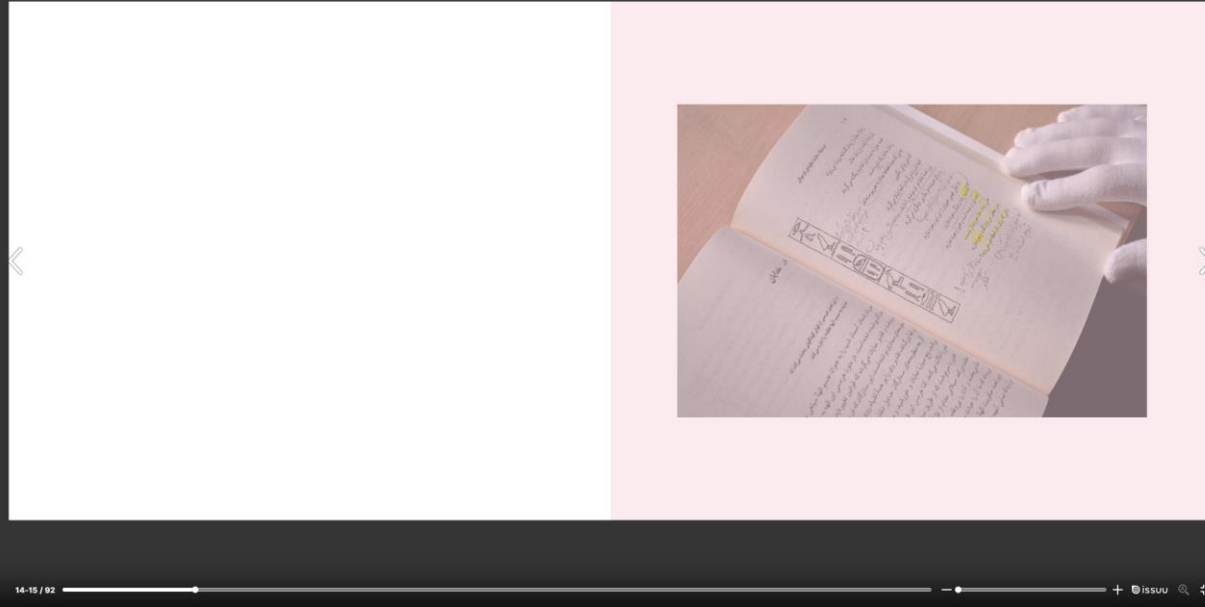












*'As a title or label, I'm a refugee from Iran - more than 9 years now. But I'm a student - the whole of my life - and I want to learn new things all the time.*

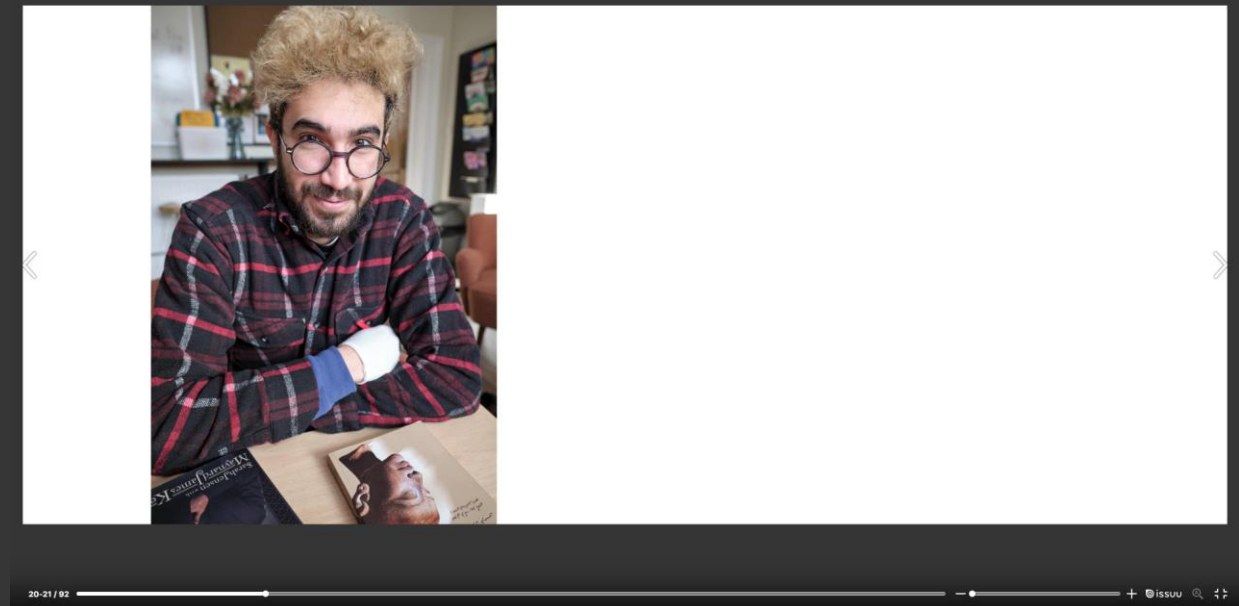
*'In all the jobs that I did, I learned that communication is more important; the feeling is more important than earning money.*

*'Refugee status helped me in that way. I mean, in nearly all the difficulties, I choose that I bring out the benefits - the things that can help me on the way.*

*'Books are the best thing in my life. I would say that, if I have a sickness, this is my sickness; buying lots of books ... and I read a lot.*

*'The main thing in my life is how can I figure out what I'm doing now, in this present moment.'*

Sahand





*'Always, I put my confidence in God. Always, I know everything will be OK ... I am Christian. My faith is growing. For me this process was not easy.'*

*'When I arrived at the city, my son and I went to the church. In that place, we found good friends – like a family. It was a good decision. Now, it is our place. Always on Sundays we say we are going to the church. For me, God is the safe place to be.'*

*'Sometimes I feel lonely. I can come to the St Augustine's Centre, but it's different ... If I go into the church, people have the same faith and we can talk together about God, about Jesus, about the Bible. We have a connection and in the middle is God.'*

*'Always when I walk, I can thank God for this and for that. For me, I always am grateful.'*

Cristela



*'I am Syrian. I am an engineer ... I have many qualifications that say I am experienced. I got permission to work recently and a National Insurance number. After Ramadan, I will start to look for work. I have had one interview and I am waiting for the results.'*

*'Reaching the UK was a great goal and a great result. It is good – very good – especially for my daughters.'*

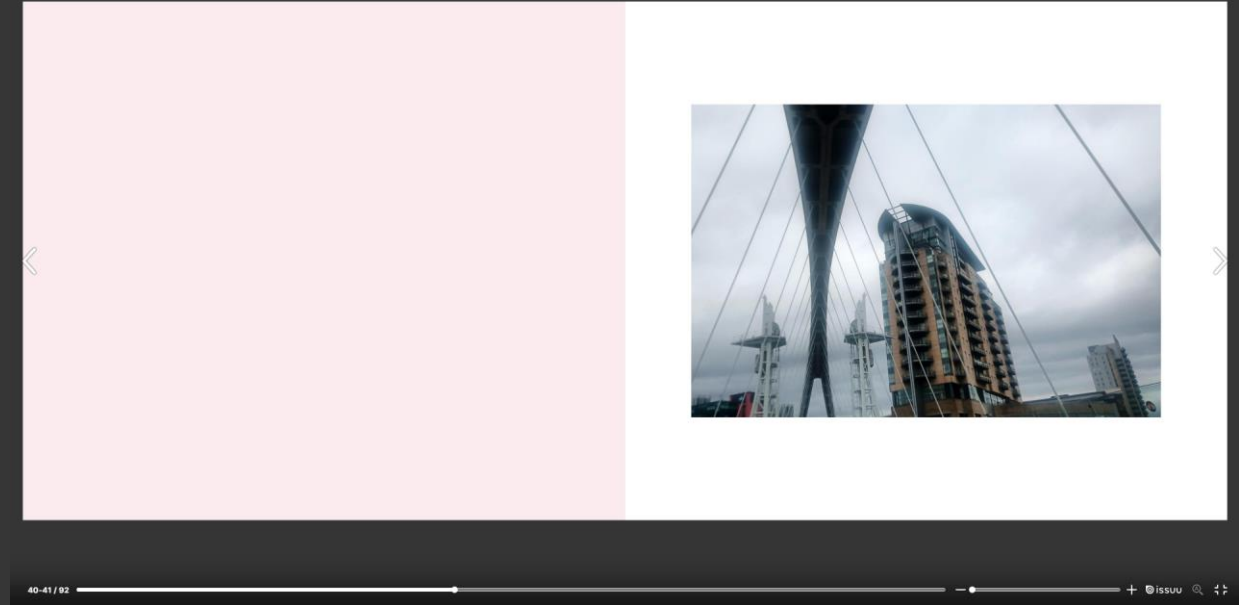
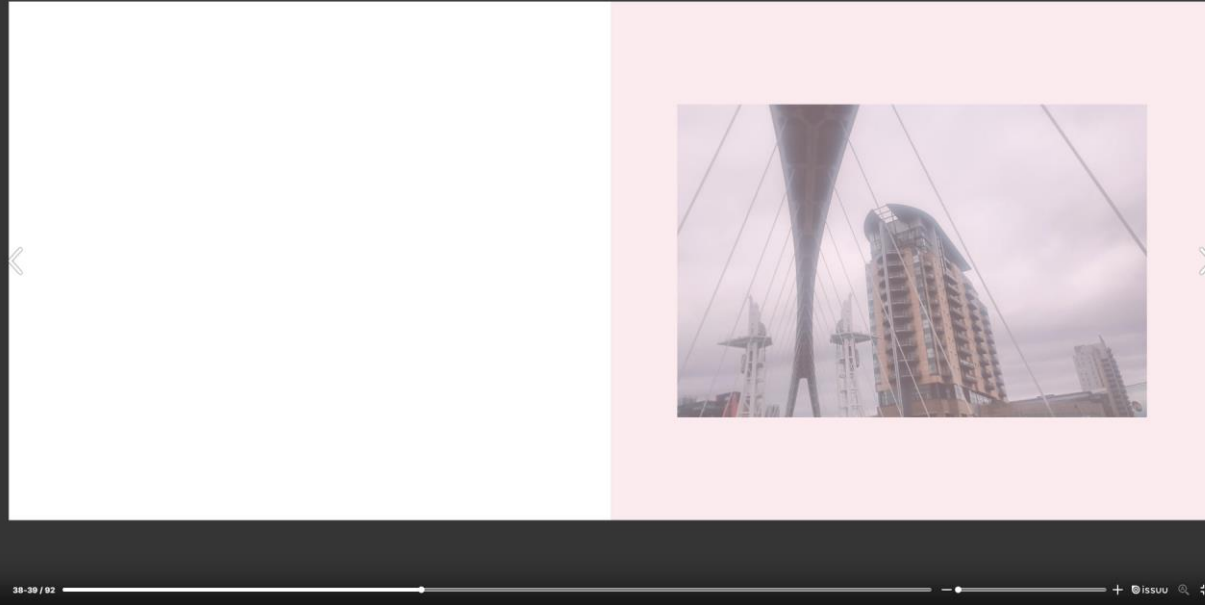
*'We feel safe here ... I can go anywhere alone. I am not afraid of the police or the army or anyone else ... my daughters can go to school. I am not scared that they will come back or not come back.'*

*'We came here – me and my wife – we made this adventure for our daughters. We hope they will complete their education ... I want them to complete university. This depends on them. They have the right to choose in the future.'*

Ammar and Alaa, with Sana (7) and Sireen (4)







*"I am from El Salvador in Latin America. I have lived in the UK for two years and three months. I am happy.*

*"I don't speak much; I am quiet.*

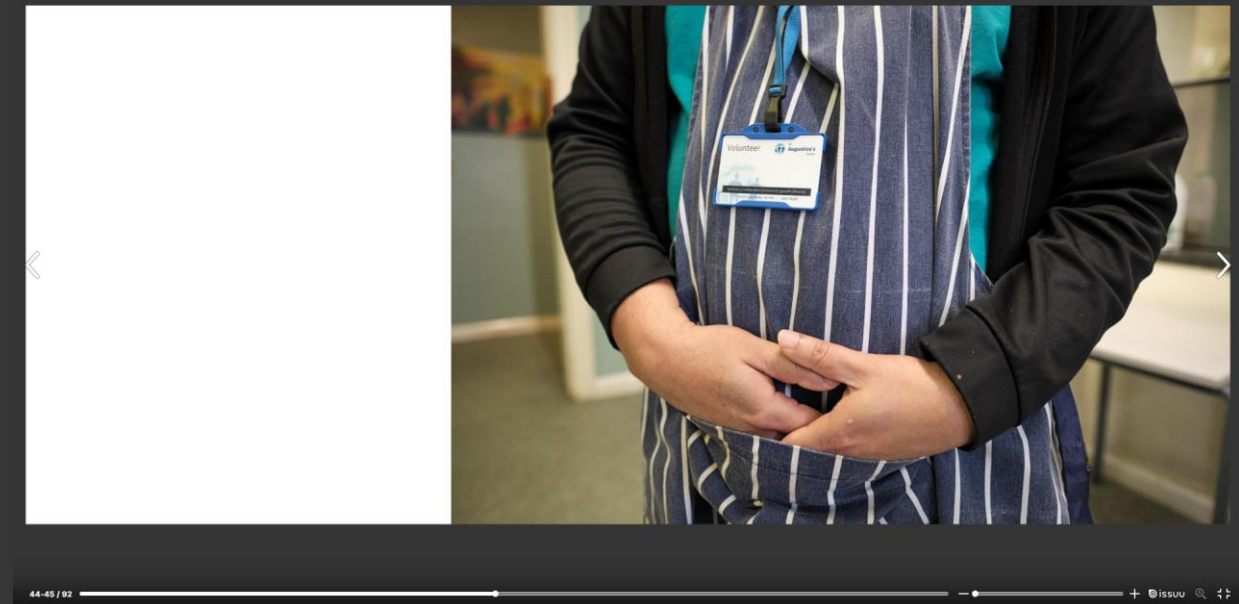
*"I enjoy work in different places ... sometimes in the kitchen garden and sometimes in the garden and sometimes helping to fix things around the centre ... in my country, I fix computers ... Gardening is relaxing.*

*"I take photographs of landscapes and architecture. I like bridges ... the lines of the bridges.*

*"I hope for work and for progress.*

*"I would like living in Scotland because it is a nice place and because it is cold. It is crazy because in my country, it is hot. But I enjoy the cold. Snow is good for me."*

Rafael





*'I am just curious about all things and I am searching ... everything is interesting around me.*

*'I realise that the time is ticking and you have to improve your knowledge.*

*'If I'm good at something in particular ... it's to make a better place for people just like me ... for the people who need help.*

*'When I have been useful, that gives energy to me ... I really like to do some positive things for me and for the people I can help.*

*'It looks like volunteering. You don't need any letters or identification that shows Sam is just like this. I am that I am.*

*'Repairing, art, music – everything that cheers me up – and sport ...  
... I like cross-fit.'*

Sam







*'Basically, I love being active ... I'm very glad to be part of the team because it gave me time to show the skills that I have and it also gave me time to help others who would like to be part of it, but don't really have the skills.*

*It gave me joy and honour by teaching someone else.*

*'I had an accident and the doctors said I had a 90% chance that I would not be able to use my right arm again – and I had already given up. Always my hand was in stiches and stuff. I used to be under vehicles, changing transmission, oil and stuff.'*

*'My next joy was, basically, tools. Anything with tools, yes, I have the capability of doing it.'*

*'[When I see something that I have made] I feel light. Light ... happy with myself inside. I can say, yes, I did this and someone else is going to enjoy it and it gives me a joy also.'*

Dirwin





*'When I came here, where there are many people that run, it encouraged me to keep on going with my fitness ... If I don't go out running, my body doesn't feel good at all ... mostly, I run three times in a week. I am prepared to get up early in the morning and go out running when it's quiet. I breathe in the fresh air and enjoy my run – mostly one hour and thirty minutes.*

*'In my running, I have learned of many places that I have never known before. I don't like to run in one place. I like to explore – where there is scenery.*

*'My cooking, when we grew up, we never had takeaway, we only had our home-cooked meals. My grandma taught me how to cook and that encouraged me to cook. Mostly, what I like cooking is beans.*

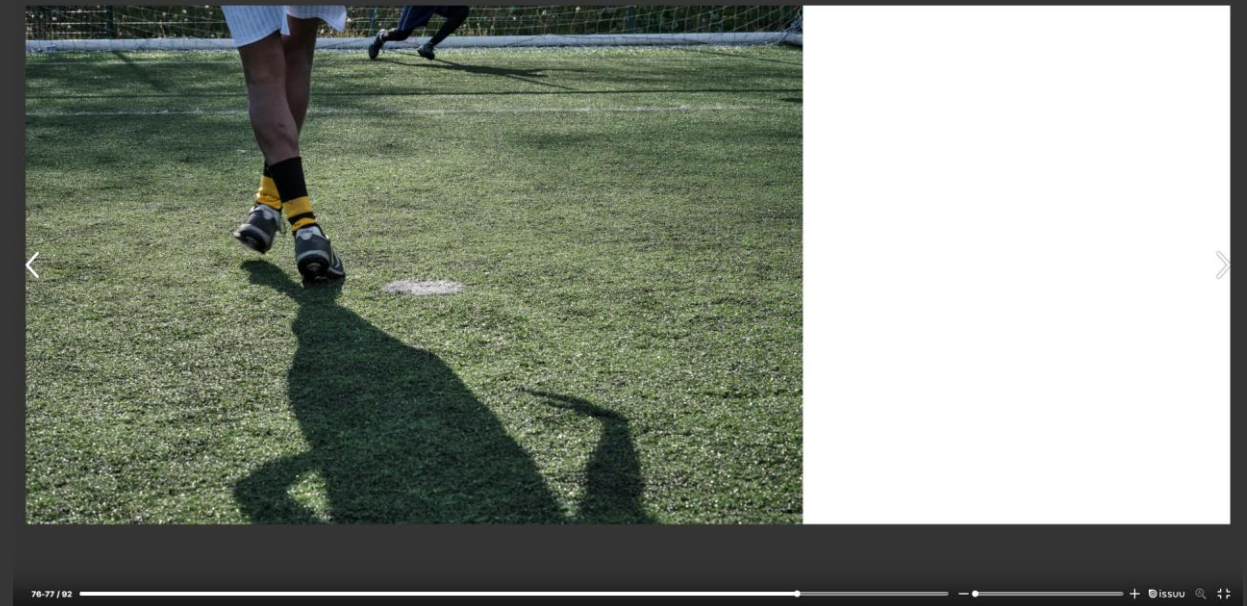
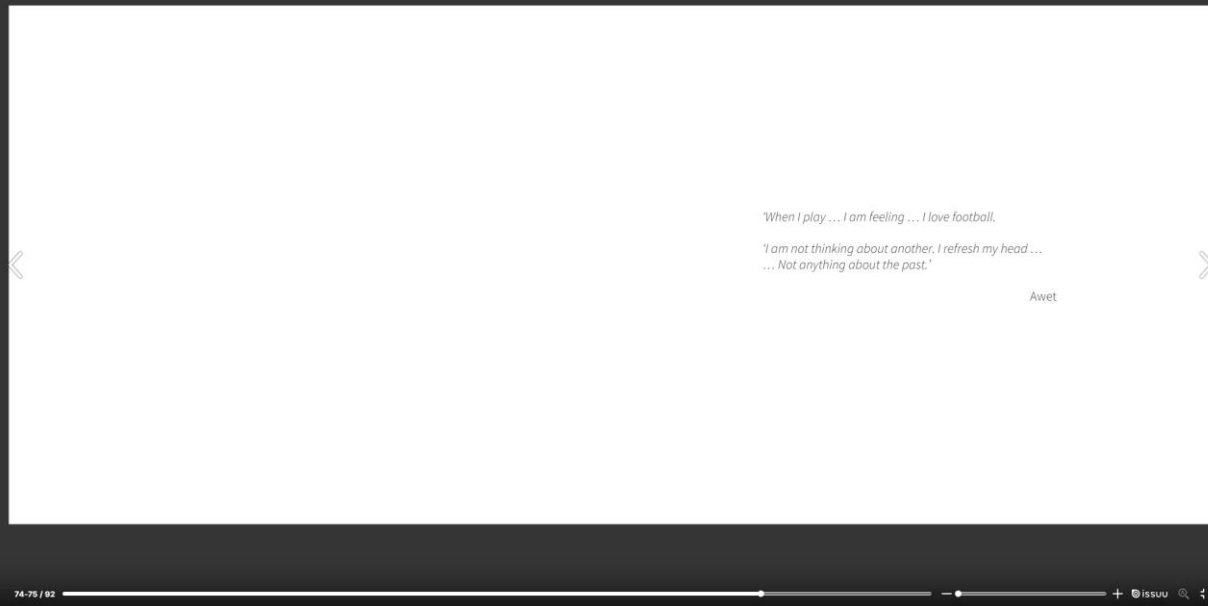
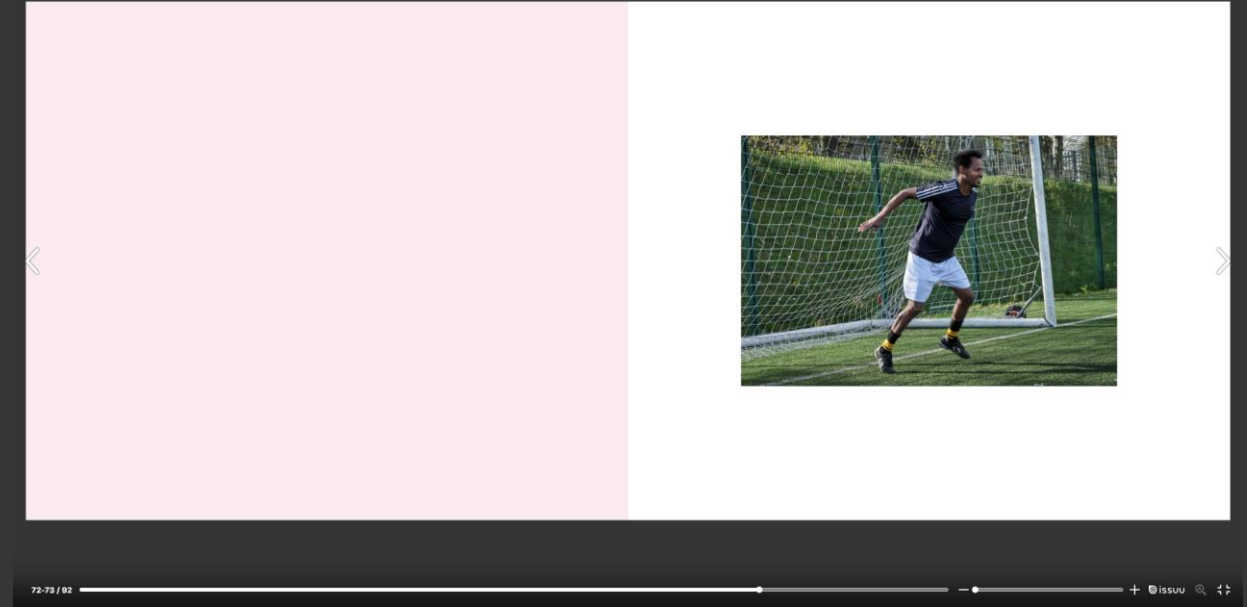
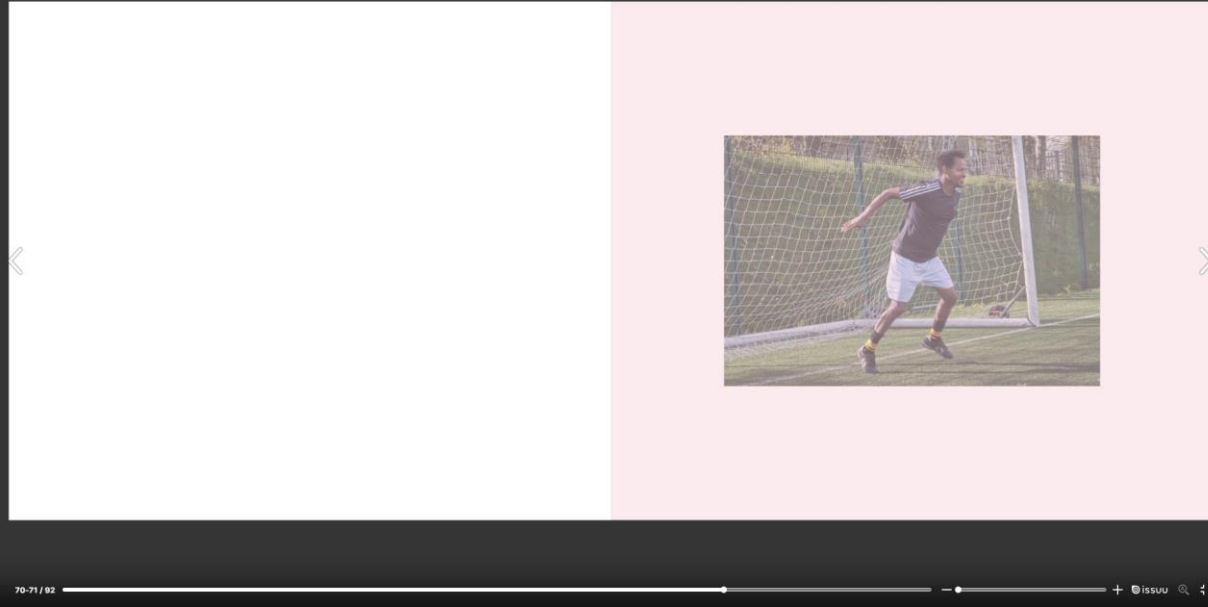
*'My youngest son didn't like to eat before. But now, when I am cooking, the smell attracts him and he will come down and say 'mum I want to eat some' ... now everybody in the house enjoys the food. My daughter is learning how to cook most of the things now.'*

Eva









*'By my knowledge. By my skill. I help people ... Maybe it's my nature. It's like a gift.*

*'I help people to get to places. I use Google Maps and I show them. And I help people to write a message or an email and with interpreting for those who can't speak English ... Amharic and Tigrinya.*

*'I feel happy when I do that. I am still learning English and am not fluent. What I know, I do in a good manner. What I don't know, I'm a quick learner. I learn a lot from people and from social media. At first, I was afraid to be with people and of speaking in a group. But I overcame my fear.*

*'To take a photograph is a good thing because it is a memory. A situation that you have is memorable in your mind. But to tell the story, it is good to share with a photograph.'*

Meklit







# Refugee Week

Refugee Week is the world's largest arts and culture festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. Founded in 1998 in the UK and held every year around World Refugee Day on the 20 June, Refugee Week 2023 (19-25 June) was the festival's 25th anniversary.

Through a programme of arts, cultural, sports and educational events alongside media and creative campaigns, Refugee Week enables people from different backgrounds to connect beyond labels, as well as encouraging understanding of why people are displaced, and the challenges they face when seeking safety. The theme for Refugee Week 2023 was 'Compassion', as the organisers explained:

*The last few years have been challenging for all of us. We are still adjusting to new realities post-lockdown as well as responding to new crises. In the UK, dangerous anti-migration government rhetoric continues, along with inhumane conditions for asylum seekers.*

*But, none of these things happen in isolation. We know how interconnected our world is: how something seemingly "far away" impacts everyone. All of this makes us even more aware of the need to widen our circles of compassion.*

*Within our own experiences are all the tools we need to be compassionate, not just to ourselves and those in our immediate circle but to all our human neighbours and our one shared home, planet earth.*

## Exhibition

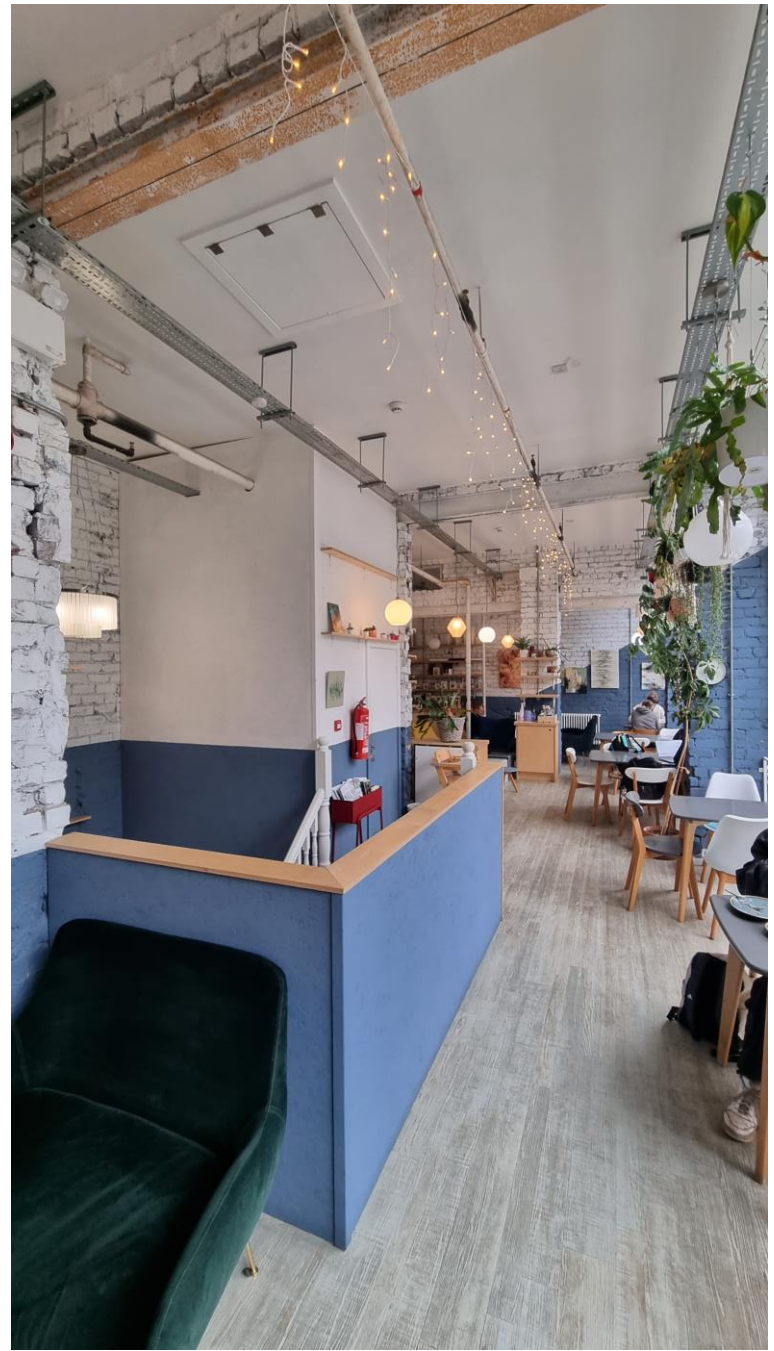
Temperance Café is an independent and long-established business located in the centre of Halifax, alongside the busy and historically important Borough Market. The owner supports the work of St Augustine's Centre by providing hospitality to groups of people seeking asylum on their arrival at the centre.

Although consideration was given to art gallery space, it was felt that the café would provide a better way of influencing grassroots opinions about the topical issue of global migration – confirmed by the café's slogan: 'For the Hoi Polloi'. Apart from ongoing political debate about a 'Stop the Boats' policy, the week prior to Refugee Week brought news of the tragic loss of around 500 migrants in the Mediterranean. So, it was likely that the topic was in people's minds.

The exhibition was situated in a corner of the upstairs part of the café where customers tend to sit to work or talk for extended periods. The rough walls of the old listed building presented some practical challenges, but use of 'Dawn Pink' mounting boards helped to create a cohesive display.

Launched on the evening of the first day of Refugee Week, an informal gathering brought together supporters and staff from St Augustine's Centre, along with many of the centre 'members' who had participated in the project, some of whom spoke about their experience and the importance of the photographic project.

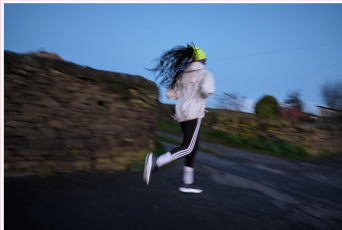
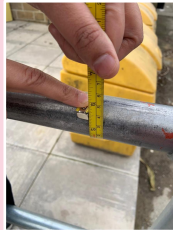
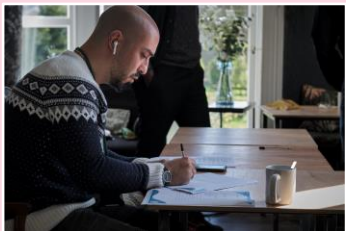
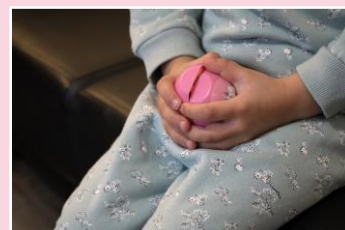
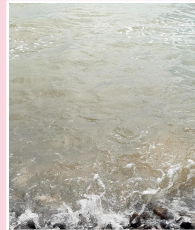
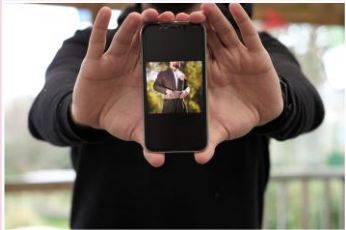














# CIRCLES OF COMPASSION

This photographic project involved collaboration between photographer Gerard Liston and ten people seeking asylum who are being supported by St Augustine's Centre in Halifax. Participants represent countries around the globe, from Eritrea to Iran and from Syria to El Salvador. An initial discussion explored aspects of their lives that bring them a sense of hope and joy.

Each participants' comments provided the brief for gathering a collection of images – some taken on a high-quality camera and some gathered from mobile phones. Out of these, two were selected to become part of a free online photobook and a free exhibition to be shared during Refugee Week, which adopted the theme of 'Compassion' for 2023.

Scan this QR code to view the photobook



## Publication

Issuu is the industry-leading digital publishing platform with more than 1M users worldwide. It provided an appropriate channel for distributing the 'Circles of Compassion' photobook because of the high image quality, compared with other flipbook services. More importantly, Issuu enabled access to the book free of charge to refugees and in a way that they could share with friends and family through social media. WhatsApp is a principal means of communication among refugees – and was so with participants throughout the project.

The full-screen link was used in all online promotion about the project, including social media channels used by St Augustine's Centre and events pages for Refugee Week. Within the first few days of Refugee Week, several hundred people had read the online photobook.

<https://issuu.com/gerard-liston/docs/compassion>







## Feedback

Apart from discussions with the university supervisor for this project, Wendy McMurdo, and among peer groups, a number of experts in socially-engaged documentary photography provided feedback about work in progress. Notably, this included meetings at the Impressions Gallery in Bradford (29 April) and the Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool (10 July):

- Ciara Leeming is a photographer and journalist based in Manchester who often collaborates with groups that are poorly served by mainstream media, including Roma migrants to the UK.
- Joanne Coates is an award-winning documentary storyteller who uses the medium of photography. Based in the north of England, she is interested in rurality, working life and class inequality.
- Liz Wewiora is a visual artist and curator and is the Head of Social Practice for Open Eye Gallery. She also manages the national network for socially engaged photography (SEPN).
- Arpita Shah is a photographic artist based between Eastbourne and Edinburgh, UK. She works across photography and film, exploring the intersections of culture and identity.
- Mark Epstein has a Master's in documentary photography and another in literature and is working on a PhD at Leeds University with a group of refugees and people affected by migration.

Feedback from staff and participants at St Augustine's Centre was particularly important. Exhibition partners, visitors and online viewers were also invited to respond.

*'I also never forget our conversations and memories! It's always my pleasure ... Honestly, I really believe and respect what you are doing and it means a lot to me!'*

Sahand, participant (WhatsApp 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023)

*'You seek to create optimism in people. Your idea of talking about the positive things in the pictures was great, because the majority ask about our past and its dangerous and sad adventures. As for you, you asked to talk about optimism and a positive outlook on the future.'*

Ammar, participant (WhatsApp 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023)

*'I dont know how to be thankful for your kindness dear Gerard. Its been really nice to see you I hope and I'm sure it will be the great vision for the world about migration of refugees and it's started from you.'*

Sam, participant (WhatsApp 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023)

*'Thank you very much for your help and compassion. Yes, I definitely want my photo and keep it as a memory, And I consider this a gift from you.'*

Sabbah, participant (WhatsApp 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023)

*'The project shines a light on the hidden lives of people who we support. It has been suggested they should be called life-seekers rather than asylum-seekers and the combination of photographs and words highlight small moments - so easily missed - that reveal their humanity.'*

*'Seeing words that they shared in conversation and the images that they selected gives the exhibition and the photobook a legitimacy and authority. Rather than exploring details about immigration or support needs (which we do daily), the work helped to reveal innermost thoughts of the participants - including many wonderful things that we did not know about them.'*

Sara Robinson, St Augustine's Centre director (email 29<sup>th</sup> June 2023)

*'Thanks for sharing what you're working on - the photobook looks great, and wonderful to read the statements and get more of an insight of the individuals you collaborated with. '*

Arpita Shah, documentary photographer (email 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023)

*'People have liked them visually, as part of the surroundings. But when people have got closer and read the written pieces, it's been quite hitting for them in a lot of cases – putting something humane into the photos. A handful of people came down especially, but generally it's been customers who've mentioned that it's been touching.'*

Joe Bates, Owner/Manager, Temperance Café (interview 18<sup>th</sup> July)



*'These are standalone photographs. Nothing detracts from what we're looking at: Peeling potatoes; measuring; sitting with a favourite toy; an image of a hand. What we might consider just mundane everyday tasks. But something about these photographs conveys a real sense of, 'after all I've been through - all I've endured - I've found my peace here', with the everyday things that most people take for granted.'*

Vikki Uttley, exhibition visitor

*'Because I really can't see to read the captions, and needed to ask people if they minded me staring across the tables (they didn't), I found the captions + pics excellent, especially as people kindly read them out to me! This happened several times and the conversations that followed were special.'*

*'People asked me how I felt about these and told me what they felt as well. They said it helped them 'see' the people shown in a wider sense and how valuable this was. They told me too that they wished that more people could see refugees and asylum-seekers showing themselves as ordinary members of society and speaking about themselves.'*

Angie Barrs, exhibition visitor

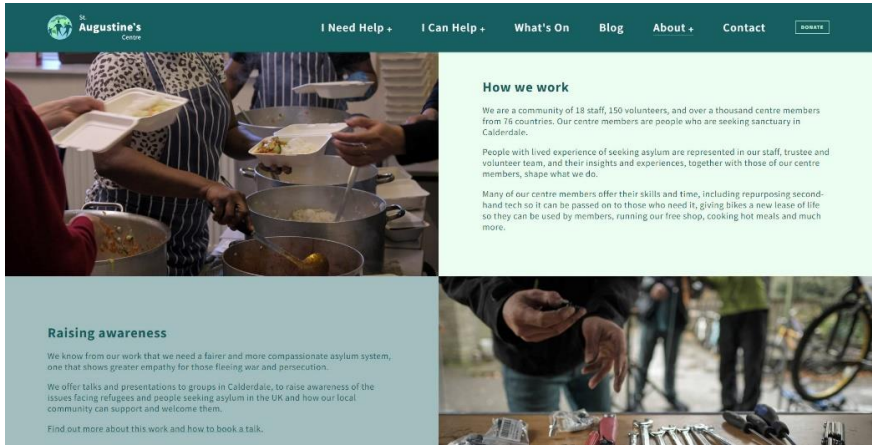
# Critical Review of Practice

Context and Motivation

Choosing to work on a collaborative photographic project with a group of asylum-seeking refugees in Halifax was no accident. My recent projects (Liston, G. 2021/22) include working with students on an ESoL course to look afresh at the post-industrial town of Halifax and showcasing the work of St Augustine’s Centre that supports hundreds of refugees placed in the town. So, the idea of a project with greater depth and purpose was born from a discussion with the centre director.



Exhibition in 2022 at Calderdale College for *Halifax: Sense of Place*



Photographs by Gerard Liston currently featured throughout the St Augustine’s Centre website



Global Migration remains a topic that regularly features in media coverage and political rhetoric. Even while this project evolved, the current government was promoting a strategy to deport refugees to Rwanda if they had arrived in the UK through illegal routes and included an intention to ‘Stop the Boats’ among its top priorities. At the same time, images continued to appear in news stories about migrants in lifejackets aboard inflatable craft, including the tragic loss of around 500 unnamed and unknown individuals whose overcrowded fishing boat capsized – a story that was completely overshadowed days later by the loss of five white adventure tourists descending to visit the Titanic.



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. BBC News website, April 2023



The Guardian, 15th June 2023

Socially engaged photographers have portrayed the plight of migrants, often seeking to tell the story of individuals so as to reveal the bigger picture. Photographers such as Jillian Edelstein (2015-20) have recorded scenes at refugee camps and Giles Duley (2017) was commissioned by the UNHCR to document the refugee crisis. Jacob Ehrbahn (2021) followed migrants who came to Europe in search of the European dream.



From *Adrift* by Jillian Edelstein



From *I Can Only Tell You What My Eyes See* by Giles Duley





From A Dream of Europe by Jacob Ehrbahn

Having spent time with staff, volunteers and ‘members’ at St Augustine’s Centre, I found myself motivated to contribute in a way that spoke more about refugees’ hopes and aspirations for the future, rather than about desperate situations they had left behind or the trauma of their journey – topics that are inevitably the basis for discussion around asylum applications.

I was particularly influenced by sensitive, creative and collaborative photographic work with refugees. In his *1000 Dreams* project, Robin Hammond (2021) mentored refugee storytellers over several months as they produced their portraits and interviews and in *To the City*, Liz Hingley (2018) explored how ‘... smartphone SIM card is the key to unlocking transnational, as well as local networks and connecting scattered loved ones’.

Working in three UK locations, and supported by Fast Forward: Women in Photography, *Putting Ourselves in the Picture* (2021-22) involved LGBTQ+ women who are in the process of seeking, or have been granted, asylum to increase awareness of women’s unheard life stories, using photography and creative storytelling practices. Similarly, but in a single location, Arpita Shah’s *From one dream to another* (2023) is an exhibition of collaborative work involving a group of young men from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds in Eastbourne.



These works provided inspiration (and some practical tips) for my collaborative project, but I was particularly moved by Alan Gignoux's project *You can see me, but I don't exist* (2023) that was prompted by hearing many refugees '... talk of being invisible both to the immigration bureaucracies and to the wider societies in the countries in which they were seeking asylum'.

All these artists helped me to think about how I might communicate something about the way that people seeking asylum are left in limbo – somewhere between their life before migration and their hoped-for future life. They motivated me to find my own way of communicating this situation within a local setting and to apply my own emotions and creative response.



From *Putting ourselves in the Picture*



From *You can see me, but I don't exist* by Alan Gignoux

### Collaboration in Practice

Talking about his assisted self-portraits, Anthony Luvera (Burbridge & Luvera, 2019) says that, ultimately, he is *'interested in how involving participants as contributors to the processes of representation can inscribe a different, more nuanced view, or otherwise complicate commonly held perceptions of their lives.'* While I had similar hopes for this photographic project, I was also acutely aware of the risk described by Wendy Ewald (2000) *that 'the subject is affected by the presence of the photographer and by the very fact of being observed. Wittingly or unwittingly, subjects relinquish their power over pictures of themselves. How they are seen, who they are seen by, and in what context they are seen—all these crucial determinants are decided by the photographer.'* Finding an appropriate process for this project that was both practical and sensitive was an essential precursor to making any images.

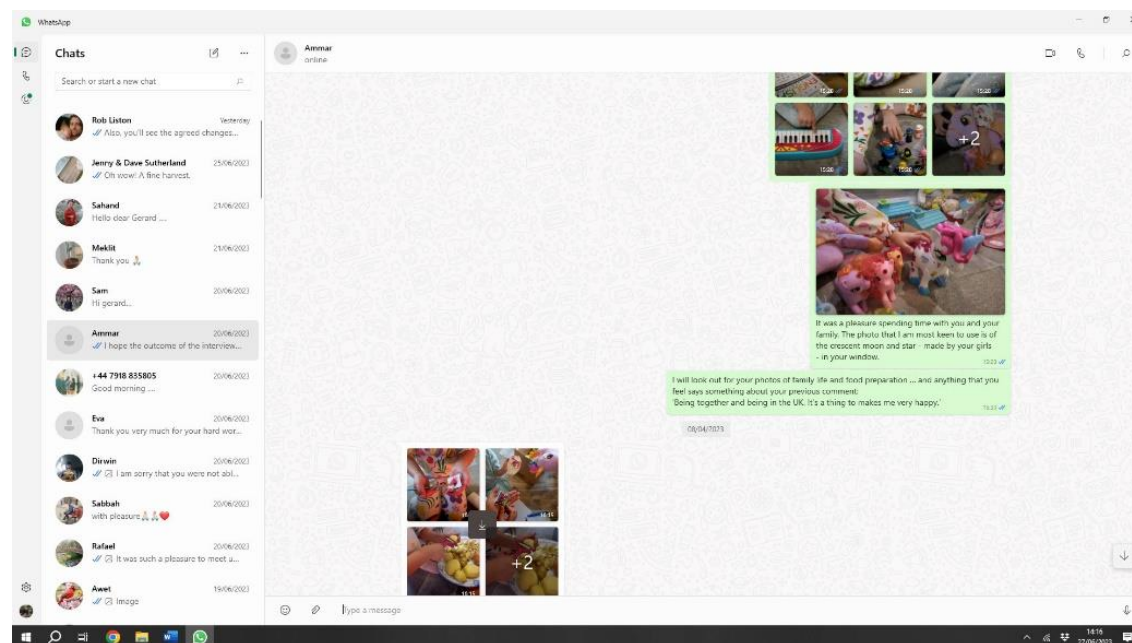
Prior work with St Augustine's Centre meant I was already a volunteer and an accepted member of the team, so I started the project with the benefit of some credentials and mutual trust. The centre director was willing to be the main contact point and I drafted a short description of the project that was shared in the centre's monthly internal newsletter, explaining that *'the new project will involve 10-15 people who have lived experience of migration and are willing to talk about their individual spirit and personality – the things that give them hope and bring joy in life. A process of listening, discussion and agreement will define the brief for photographs that try to express these individual stories.'*

Responses to the invitation were reviewed by the centre director to ensure there was a genuine interest and an overall balance of gender and country of origin before contact details were passed on to arrange an initial meeting. This discussion was recorded, with the participants' comments transcribed – often retaining imperfect English and idioms – to become the basis for thinking about associated images.

With smartphones being the essential tool for communication among refugees, WhatsApp provided the main channel for dialogue with participants to agree text and then to arrange photography sessions and select images. I drafted a concise ‘Checklist for Creative Photography’ (appendix) to guide participants about producing new images or selecting from existing collections, stressing that *‘creativity is much, much more important than technical skill or fancy equipment’*.

The ten participants who contributed to the project represented countries including Iran, Eritrea, Syria and El Salvador. Google translate was sometimes required to enable communication without the need to involve language experts.

The variety of nationalities was matched by the variety of ‘things that give them hope and bring joy in life’ – ranging from football and faith to traditional ceremonies and their own children. Even where participants were unable or unwilling to provide images themselves, no attribution was given in the final selection. The story that was being collectively shaped and shared seemed more important than authorship of artwork.



WhatsApp communication with participants



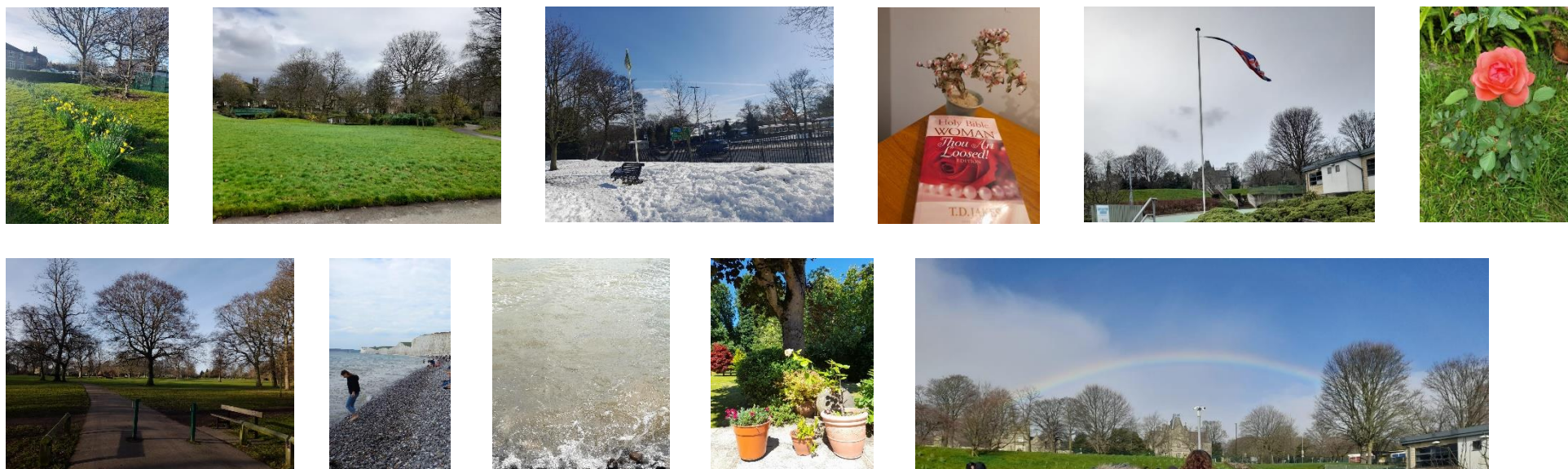
The process varied across the ten participants. For example, the output from working with Cristela, who came to the UK with her young son from El Salvador, illustrates the range of material from which two final images were selected:



Reference photographs by Gerard Liston



Location portraits by Gerard Liston

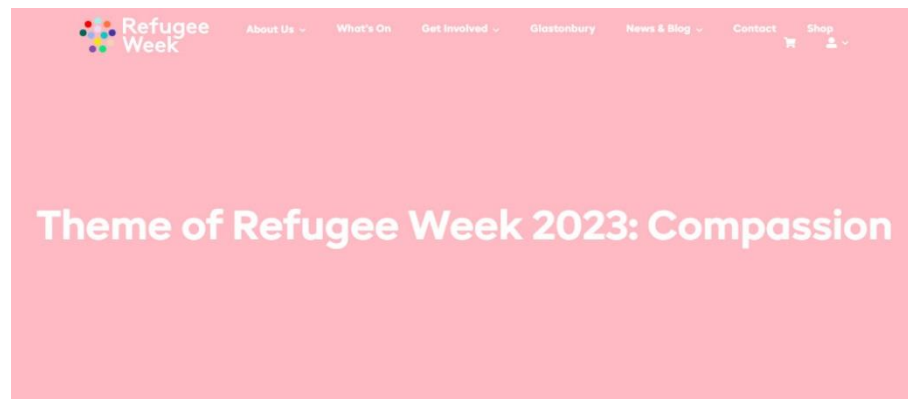


Photographs submitted by Cristela

### The theme of 'Compassion'

The word 'compassion' originates from the Latin word 'patire' – to suffer – and literally means to suffer with. It was therefore encouraging to receive feedback during the project, such as followed an initial discussion with Ammar from Syria, who shared on WhatsApp: *'I am happy to meet people like you, especially that you are talking about the positive points'*.

A compassionate representation of refugees in the UK was a personal objective for the project, so it was a happy coincidence that the theme for Refugee Week 2023 was 'Compassion' and that this took place during June, providing both a personal target and motivation in this final task to complete an MA in Photography.



Refugee Week website, June 2023

The theme was developed by Refugee Week through a quotation by Albert Einstein about ‘circles of compassion’ - a concept that emphasises the importance of extending empathy and care to all living beings and the environment. It encourages us to recognise the interconnectedness of all life forms and the responsibility we have to protect and nurture them. It urges us to extend empathy beyond our immediate circle of family, friends, and community.

My intention was that, by developing a set of ten pairs of images, associated with comments from a named person who is currently seeking asylum, I could help to widen the circle of compassion of people viewing the work.

Sharing work with the public

As part of the planning and preparation for this collaborative project, I took part in an online national conference with Refugee Week in March 2023 and consulted with Counterpoints Arts and IMIX Media, which is ‘a team of professional communication experts who want to change the conversation about migration and refugees to create a more welcoming society’.



Refugee Week national conference, March 2023



This guidance recommended that reaching out to a local audience with a local message is mostly likely to influence grass roots opinions about migration and IMIX Media state goals for four primary groups:

- Liberals: to mobilise, enthuse, and help to persuade others
- Grafters: to persuade using simple frames and common-sense arguments
- Traditionalists: to reassure, put at ease and (sometimes) rouse
- Sceptics: to defuse, contain and neutralise

So, the choice of a popular and trendy town centre café adjacent to the busy Borough Market was very deliberate. Combined with a free-to-view online photobook published in the Issuu platform, my aim was to make the work accessible and shareable for everyone – not just those with an interest in art, photography and galleries.

The use of ‘Dawn Pink’ for virtual end-papers and tissue inter-leaves in the photobook and for the mounting boards in the café exhibition was prompted partly by colours used in promotion for Refugee Week but also by seeing trees laden with spring cherry blossom in the garden surrounding St Augustine’s Centre. It seemed to speak about hope and compassion and provided a colour code across all parts of the project.



### Ethical Considerations

Throughout this project, I have been conscious of my own role within the collaborative process; working alongside people who had taken great risks and were making their case to remain in the UK. I am white, male, in a position of relative privilege and power and live in a country that has a history of colonialism and whose industrialisation has contributed to the effects of climate change that triggers migration for many. Susan Sontag (1977) warns about this power dynamic where *‘to photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.’*

Before working as a volunteer with St Augustine’s Centre, I completed a safeguarding training course. But perhaps the greatest safeguard has been my awareness of the risks as I have proceeded with the project, rather like Arpita Shah (2022) explains: *‘To be an ethical photographer is to accept your learning from experiences, that you’re learning and there isn’t a straight guide to how to be ethical ... crucially it’s about being aware of the power you have as a photographer, being responsible and accountable for that trust that people are giving you when they allow you to photograph them, respecting that agreement, respecting them.’*

Of course, this project is not just a collaboration between a photographer and a group of people seeking asylum. The underlying purpose has been to contribute to the discussion about global migration and, using images and words, to influence grass-roots opinions about this important subject. Viewers of the exhibition and the photobook are part of the collaborative process. Ariella Azoulay (2012) talks about photography’s potential for political engagement and how it establishes a civil contract between the photographer, the photographed subject, and the viewer. She argues that when a photograph is taken, it is not only the subject that is exposed but also the photographer and this exposure entails a responsibility to maintain a level of ethical engagement and accountability towards the subject and the viewers.

If anything, I have veered towards anonymity in this project, seeking to put the spotlight on participants' words and not differentiating my photography from images contributed by others. I neither need to make a living from this project nor elevate my reputation. While acknowledging that this 'Final Major Project' contributes to a Masters degree, the personal learning experience has been more valuable and important than any academic attainment.

Although an apparently small matter, I feel it is both significant and encouraging that all the participants who were asked expressed a desire to own their framed pair of photographs when the exhibition was dismantled.

Future Development

Working on this and previous projects with St Augustine's Centre has resulted in unexpected outcomes, including a request from The Sanctuary in Sheffield – a charity carrying out similar work in that city – to provide images for their annual report.





In the same period, I completed a project with Extinction Rebellion for ‘The Big One’ protest in London and developed an environmental project about the power of nature, involving people in the Upper Calder Valley, as part of the Hebden Bridge Arts Festival. So, although not wanting to be ‘pigeon-holed’ as a photographer of refugee projects, the experience of the last few months has confirmed my commitment to socially engaged photography – prompting me to join the Socially Engaged Photography Network (SEPN), run by Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool.

In turn, involvement in SEPN led to an invitation to participate in their ‘Crossing Sectors’ professional training programme in 2024. The two-month-long programme supports practitioners to explore the multiple ways culture can be co-authored with others and questions where contemporary art and photography practice can exist in society today. It is an exciting opportunity for personal and professional development.

Rather like work by Rich Wiles (2021) that was co-authored with a Syrian refugee family, I feel my own project is a ‘... *universal story told in a personal way, raising debates surrounding issues of displacement, identity, resettlement, integration and home. It will challenge stereotypical images of refugees, and counteract negative perceptions in politics and the media.*’ Moving forward, I feel there is a need to examine perhaps the more challenging issue of our own culpability in the ‘migration crisis.’

So, my intention is to submit a funding application over the coming year to support a new project around the theme of culpability, exploring the connection between global migration and past histories and current lifestyles in the West – and our individual response when faced with that reality. Feedback about my MA project suggests there is an opportunity for an honest appraisal that could help to deepen British society’s understanding about an issue that is topical, complex and really, really important.

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## Appendix

### Checklist for Creative Photography

Between March-April 2023, centre members from both St Augustine's in Halifax and The Sanctuary in Sheffield will work collaboratively with Gerard Liston to create photographs that **communicate something about what brings hope and joy into life**. So, the set of images created with each participant will be unique and they will all be combined into the final publication and display.

This is an opportunity for participants to **express their ideas through photography**. It is not a photography course or workshop. **Creativity is much, much more important than technical skill or fancy equipment**. But it may be helpful to refer to this simple guidance:

#### **Remember YOUR personal viewpoint**

Each participant will have their own expression of hope and joy. So, when taking and selecting images, this must be the test about what to include. It is not about whether you like a photo or not – or even if it is a good photo. Does it say something about your viewpoint?

#### **Take a LOT of photographs**

By all means think carefully and even plan where you go and what you will photograph. But even the best photographers in the world say they have to take a lot of photographs in order to find something worth keeping. So, take a lot of pictures and be ruthless about editing.

#### **Ask 'What is this image ABOUT'**

When sharing photographs with friends and family, we often explain, *'this is a photograph of...'* But our project is trying to share ideas about hope and joy, which are feelings and emotions. So, check that your images work together to achieve this.

#### **Get yourself CLOSE to the subject**

You might know what one of your photographs is meant to be about. But, if there is a lot of irrelevant detail around the main subject, then this will distract the viewer and weaken the image. So, even if it makes you feel a little uncomfortable, get in close to the subject matter.

#### **AVOID smiles and poses (mostly)**

People often respond with a smile or a pose when a camera – even a mobile phone – is pointed at them. Unless there is a special reason, try to capture images of people that are natural – and this is usually easiest when you are feeling natural and relaxed too.

#### **Photography is about LIGHT**

By definition, a photograph involves drawing with light. So, try to use lighting that adds something to your image. Soft lighting can create a sense of gentleness. Strong lighting and back-lighting can add drama. You might even choose a scene with very little light.