

SAM & MERYN'S STORY CONTINUED....

Sam came to the UK from Morocco in May 1975 under the UK Agency Immigration Scheme. He had a work permit, Green Book, Moroccan passport and all was legal and legitimate. In September 1978 he lost everything, including all of his documents, in a fire which destroyed the pub where he was working in Sussex. Sam did not have the funds to return to Morocco to replace the lost passport - a prerequisite to replacing the Home Office documents.

Sam continued to work as a chef for pay and accommodation and continued to pay his N.I. contributions and PAYE tax. In 2012 the Home Office became aware of Sam and declared him an illegal immigrant with no rights to remain or work in the UK. With no right to work as a chef, this meant he also lost his accommodation.

In need of help, Sam approached KCAH and the Late Rev'd Peter Holmes at St Peter's Church. An application was made to the Home Office for his 'right to remain in the UK. Unfortunately the application became a casualty of a set of controversial government policies, dubbed 'Hostile Environment,' introduced in 2012 by the then-Home Secretary, Theresa May, with the aim to make life difficult in the UK for immigrants who cannot show the right paperwork (these policies became synonymous with the Windrush Scandal).

Sam met Meryn at the Great Feast in 2013. Meryn says, "I first met Sam when he started volunteering at a weekly hot meal for rough sleepers at St Peter's Church, where I was Church Warden. When the Home Office discovered he had no documentation he was threatened with deportation and ordered to stop working. As a result, he spent the next 8 years on the streets or sofa-surfing, which really took its toll. He lost a lot of weight and contracted TB and bowel cancer; it's been an appalling time for him!

I guided him through two more applications to the Home Office and how to sign on to Job-Seekers, access health care, open a bank account, access the housing register and other complexities of living in a sophisticated society, where it's easy to get lost and left behind. I've lost count of how many surgical procedures Sam's had since they diagnosed cancer, but now he's reasonably well.

In August 2016 Sam was granted 'Limited Leave to Remain Outside the Rules' (LOTR). This was a great relief, but by that time Sam was not well enough to work and was still homeless! He's on the 10-year route to 'permanent leave to remain', but he has to apply four times every two and a half years. We'll try again under the 20-year rule next year, and that could be successful. Thankfully, in December 2019 the Kingston Housing Department granted Sam semi-sheltered accommodation in a ground floor studio flat, with Wardens around the clock! It's been a very long-winded process but now Sam couldn't be in a better place - it's brilliant!"