

Where is Home – From Syria to Huddersfield

Hassan Mohammed, 25 years old, Syrian refugee

This story was collected by the Kirklees Cohesion Team, if you would like to share your story, please contact cohesion@kirklees.gov.uk

- **What were your childhood and adulthood like back in your hometown?**

I simply didn't enjoy school as other kids did but enjoyed football and handy work and fixing stuff, so when I was teenager I started to do some small handy works here and there. Later I got interested in swimming pools and making them for houses and businesses which end up being my specialty in addition to electrical work. I started to take some electrical work here but have not worked on any swimming pools.

- **Can you please tell us about your journey to the UK?**

I had to leave Syria in 2012 when the war got intense especially in the town where I lived with my family. Things started to be unbearable after you spend all your day worried if you will get bombed from the air or murdered in the ground. I had to bury 22 of my friends in one day so after that I felt that this is **not home anymore**. Consequently, I left with my dad on a risky journey to the rural part of Lebanon (bordering country with Syria) which was still not simple. It was hard to find a job as you need someone to sponsor you and to pay them to cover your residency. After couple of years I found a French company which sponsored me and offered me a job to stay in Beirut, Lebanon. Before that I was already registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for humanitarian protection. I thought at first that I will be out of Syria for one month and the war will stop and would be able to go back home but 10 years and the war is still ongoing and there is no hope for that day to come soon.

- **How did you find Kirklees?**

When I arrived at Manchester airport, there was someone waiting for us who was very welcoming and told me about Manchester's football teams, which I was pleased to hear and made me smile. Once I arrived in Huddersfield, I was amazed to find many Arabs and Arabic shops and restaurants here because I thought there would be none which made it very pleasing to see. I have started to explore the area with someone

from the council and where are the shops and services. This was at the beginning hard to do alone as all the streets and buildings look the same, not as back home where each area has its own architecture and things which makes you able to differentiate where you are.

- **What do you like about Kirklees?**

It has not been now a year and half for me here but it has started to feel that if I leave Huddersfield or go to visit another city or town, I miss **Huddersfield as a home** and can't wait to get back. I enjoy how everything is approachable; you can find diverse types of food to try and order at any time; different green spaces to visit and explore; various places of worship where I can go to a mosque to practice my faith; and people are so friendly as I have made a good network of friends.

- **What food do you enjoy in the UK?**

I enjoy cooking and trying things myself but I sometimes enjoy fast food from KFC and McDonalds. I also enjoy going to Starbucks and have their coffee.

- **What has been the biggest difference that you have noticed between British society and your country?**

The thing that really got my attention is that if you have any paperwork with the public or private sector, it will get sorted without the need to bribe or to know someone to facilitate your papers to get completed. Everyone is following the country's rules and laws and that gives you a sort of fairness and safety which we lacked back home. The other thing that got my attention is that whether you are rich or poor, you will still have some sort of livelihoods and aspects of life compared to back home where, if you are not rich and wealthy, you will struggle in your daily livelihoods. Some of our traditions of how we stay with our family until we get married and look after them all our lives are things that I haven't seen much here where you get to be independent once you reach a certain age and look after only yourself.

- **What are your aspirations for the future?**

I think having a safe and normal life where you are able to have a decent job, to afford a family house and settle so you can start a new life and make new future for your kids.

- **What is one thing that each country could learn from the other?**

Syria could learn from the UK that finding opportunities and investing in youth are more important than anything because they are the future of

any society. Most of the young people and people of my age who came here to study or work or settle wanted to prove themselves and their skills so this could all have been offered by our government before the war happened. Syria is rich in things that could potentially create opportunities for people such as tourism, agriculture and oil industry.

UK could learn from Syria about the importance of the social aspect of communities, where neighbours look after each other and their neighbourhoods and visit each other regularly to bond and break down barriers among them.

Hassan
snow in
2021



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Huddersfield,



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