

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION AND RESEARCH IN WELLBEING

# CIRW

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

A person is standing on a rocky peak in the foreground, looking out over a vast, hazy mountain range. The landscape is covered in dense green forests and rolling hills, with a soft, golden light filtering through the air, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is serene and expansive.

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# Welcome

The Centre for Innovation and Research in Wellbeing (CIRW) brings together research, scholarship and expertise on wellbeing and builds on growth in academic research and service development in this area. The Centre is a leading interdisciplinary, innovative and international centre in the field of wellbeing. The activities of the Centre focus in particular on four key areas: migration and wellbeing, nature and wellbeing, poverty and marginalisation, and religion and spirituality.

As we move into the new academic year, CIRW continues to provide visible leadership within the field of wellbeing, drawing together partnerships that engage stakeholders in academic institutions and in policy and practice. It also acts as a hub for externally facing profile through developing high-profile events addressing key and emerging research areas in wellbeing and through updating and improving our web-based profile and social media accounts. The Centre also supports the generation of an intellectual community through collaboration with key centres in the University (e.g. SMRC, IDS) and a wide range of national and international partners. Key international partner institutions and centres include Centre for the Social Study of Migration and Refugees (CESSMIR) and the Centre for Children in Vulnerable Situations (CCVS) at Ghent University. These partnerships have given rise to a number of research initiatives with clear policy implications including the large scale RefugeeWellSchool project funded by EU Horizon 2020.

Our visible leadership in the field is apparent at international, national, and regional and local levels. Internationally, CIRW enjoys close links with a range of universities across Europe and in North America. National partnerships include collaboration with Kings College, University of London, the Refugee Mental Health and Place Network (ESRC Society and Mental Health), Natural England. Regional links include participation in Health and Wellbeing subcommittee of the Sussex Local Nature Partnership and collaborative work with Berwick Church on Art, Spirituality and Wellbeing.

A key feature of our work is the involvement of doctoral students in contributing to, and shaping, the Centre. Anna Ridgewell plays a pivotal role in initiating and supporting events and her PhD research into children, nature and wellbeing is a catalyst for future seminars and knowledge exchange including a highly successful seminar with colleagues from Natural England. Ella Delaine's research in the field of religion, spirituality and wellbeing has given rise to a seminar on Religious Belonging and Wellbeing. Emma Soye's contribution to the RefugeeWellSchool project has given rise to a series of collaboratively produced academic papers and close partnership with academic colleagues in the National Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies in Norway.

We continue to have a balanced portfolio of funded research, demonstrating international, national and interdisciplinary collaborations. The Centre also offers opportunities to enrich existing partnerships for example with Sussex Community Development Association and Action for Rural Sussex. We have strong synergies between teaching and research. Teaching draws directly from ongoing research projects and collaborative links. Charles, Anna, Ella and Emma all contribute to research-led teaching on our modules, drawing on recent and emerging findings from a number of research projects.

Professor Charles Watters,  
Centre for Innovation and Research in Wellbeing



# Research Highlights

## RefugeesWellSchool

Professor Charles Watters has been UK PI for RefugeesWellSchool, a European funded Horizon2020 project carried out by seven different partners in six European countries (Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and the United Kingdom). The overall objective of the RefugeesWellSchool was to further the evidence-base on the role of preventive, school-based interventions in promoting refugee and migrant adolescents' mental well-being, and on how they can be implemented in diverse educational settings. The work places particular emphasis on those interventions furthering social support networks and social cohesion. In 2022-23 there has been a focus on disseminating the results of the project through academic publications.

## Placemaking and Wellbeing

Professor Charles Watters concluded UK research that has focussed on examining placemaking and wellbeing in Southeast England, with field sites in Southwark, Canterbury and Folkestone. The research has been part of an international partnership led by the Institute for Development Studies and includes research universities in Norway, Finland and India. One aspect of the research has been examining recent arrivals to the SE of England by boat and their accommodation in former military barracks.

## Place-making, quality of life and mental health in England's asylum landscape

In partnership with colleagues at Kings College, Freedom from Torture, Kent Refugee Action Network and a range of other academic and practice-based partners, we launched an ambitious interdisciplinary research programme that aims to understand and facilitate placemaking practices among sanctuary seekers (refugees and asylum seekers) to create places of belonging and improve their quality of life (QoL) and mental health in England. We have chosen to explore sanctuary seeker QoL and mental health from the vantage point of 'place' and 'placemaking' as studies show that those who flee their country 'embody the relationship between health and place'. Displacement, can destroy connections to place through destruction and disruption of social ties, communities, land and belongings. In host societies, sanctuary seekers face further barriers such as social isolation and discrimination, poverty, unemployment and lack of access to basic resources. We have established a Refugee Mental Health and Place Network with regular meeting and knowledge exchange events. In 22-23 we applied for a ESRC large grant to undertake a four-year study 'Place-making, quality of life and mental health in England's asylum landscape'. The application was shortlisted and out of four reviewers two judged it 'outstanding' and a further two 'excellent'. Unfortunately, it narrowly missed being selected for funding. Undeterred, the group are preparing a further bid to fund this innovative study.

# CIRW Events and Co-hosted Events

A round up of CIRW events over the last year

## The case of deportation of refugees from Israel to Rwanda: Methodological and ethical considerations of Public and Media Co-dissemination (PMC)

CIRW Seminar  
Tuesday 17 January 2023

In this timely event, visiting CIRW Research Fellow Dr Lior Birger outlined the 2018 Israeli government plan to forcibly deport refugees to Rwanda. Dr Birger discussed the qualitative research that she and colleagues Shahar Shoham and Liat Bolzman conducted, which explored the narratives of refugees who had previously made the journey. Findings revealed that the promises for protection in Rwanda went unfulfilled, with refugees instead pressured to embark on life-threatening travel across the Sahara and the Mediterranean, eventually gaining legal status in Europe. The research served as the basis for an unprecedented civil society campaign, eventually leading the government of Israel to cancel the deportation plan.

Dr Birger also critically discussed the model of Public and Media Co-dissemination (PMC) used to disseminate the research findings and its ethical implications.



Demonstration in Berlin, calling on the Rwandan government not to accept refugees deported from Israel  
(Photo: Shahar Shoham)



Interview conducted in Holland, August 2017  
(Photo: Shahar Shoham)

## Nkabom: A little medicine, a little prayer

Film screening, discussion and Q&A  
Friday 31 March 2023

Ghana has long been the focus of international concerns regarding the human rights of people with mental illness, particularly those who are chained by traditional and faith-based healers. Filmed in 2019 in rural villages and market towns in central Ghana, the film *Nkabom* follows the activities of mental health nurses and healers working together to reduce harmful practices and to improve the treatment of people with mental health conditions. The film shows how their partnerships develop, what makes them successful, and the challenges faced in negotiating the removal of restraints as well as accessing resources. The nurses and healers 'ka bom', or join together, to reach the same goal of helping their patients recover.

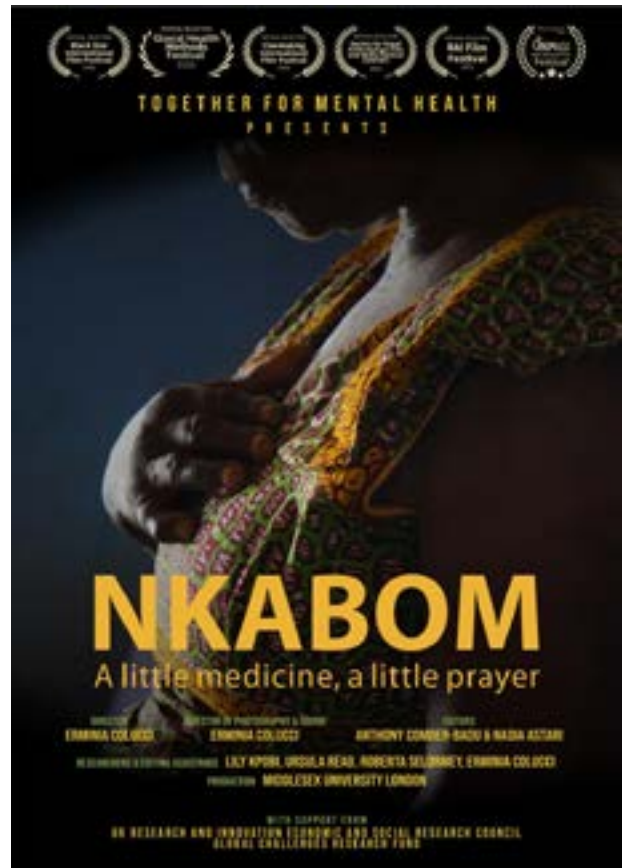
*Nkabom* is part of the Together for Mental Health project funded by the UKRI ESRC Global Challenges Research Fund.

Lily Kpobi is a Research Fellow at the University of Ghana with a background in psychology and has worked in the field of mental health for thirteen years. She was a Postdoctoral Fellow on the Together for Mental Health project.

Ursula Read is a Senior Research Fellow at Warwick University, with a background in occupational therapy and a PhD in Anthropology from University College London. She was Co-Investigator on the Together for Mental Health project.

In this special event hosted by CIRW, Dr Lily Kpobi and Dr Ursula Read introduced the film, before a full screening, followed by a discussion and Q&A.

To watch a trailer for the film, scan the QR code below:



## Wellbeing Collection launch

University of Sussex Library  
Thursday 27 April 2023

At this informal event, CIRW Doctoral Researchers Anna Ridgewell and Ella Delaine discussed their PhD research and reflected on the wellbeing benefits of nature contact and spirituality. A lively discussion followed the talks and audience members were also invited to learn more about the new library wellbeing collection of books and the Listening Desk - a new sound installation, one of only ten installed by artist Emily Peasgood, around the UK. Users can sit at the desk and choose from a selection of wellbeing-themed sounds, digitised as part of the Unlocking our Sounds Heritage (UOSH) project. This was a national project to preserve and make accessible our nation's sound recordings, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, managed by the British Library with the Keep as our local hub.



Chloe Dobson (Collection Development Librarian), Ella Delaine and Anna Ridgewell



The Listening Desk



## Child Bereavement Support Network Conference

A CIRW co-hosted event  
Tuesday 5 September 2023

CIRW-affiliated Faculty Tish Marrable collaborated with the Sussex NHS Child Death Review team to put on the second annual Pan-Sussex Child Bereavement Support Network Conference. The day drew together staff and students from within the NHS and associated third sector organisations, the University of Chichester and local support groups for bereaved parents. The University of Sussex was represented by James Croft, Chaplain and Lead Faith Advisor and by Tish, who concluded the day with a talk about working with bereaved autistic parents.



Representatives from the following organisations spoke at the event: St Richards & Worthing Hospitals; Pregnancy Options; Sands United (Brighton & Hove); DadPad/Icon; Oscar's Wish; Jigsaw South East; Andy's Angels; Grief Encounter; Chestnut Tree House Hospice.





## Connecting people with nature: Talk and Q&A with experts from Natural England

Thursday 12 October 2023

At this CIRW Seminar we welcomed Dr Louise Montgomery and Dave Bell from Natural England, to speak about their important work connecting people with nature.

Louise presented Natural England research which provides opportunities for school pupils to visit nature, discussing the optimal approaches to outdoor learning, how visits are delivered, overcoming potential barriers and implications for schools, providers and policy makers.

Dave provided an overview of Natural England's work delivering its core mission of thriving nature for people and planet. He outlined current links in policy and legislation around nature recovery and health, highlighting opportunities for greater alignment in the future. He also shared findings from the national Green Social Prescribing Pilots as an example of working collaboratively across sectors.

Natural England is the government's statutory advisor on nature conservation, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Natural England's vision is of thriving nature for people and planet. Their ambition is not just to improve nature, but to see it thriving everywhere, because a healthy natural environment is fundamental to everyone's health, wealth and happiness.



## Religious Belonging and Wellbeing: discussion, reflection and meditation

Wednesday 15 November 2023

This stimulating discussion, focussing on religious belonging, identity and practice and its connection to wellbeing, was led by PhD researchers Chris McDermott and Ella Delaine.

Ella Delaine, a PhD student in the Department of Education and Social Work, introduced her doctoral work on the topic of 'Spiritual and Secular Approaches to Mental Distress Among Buddhists in the UK: Navigations and Interactions of Multiple Therapeutic Realities'. She presented some early research findings, based on ethnographical fieldwork and interview data, that explore the pathways into Buddhism for people from the Global North and the ways in which Buddhist ideas and practices can impact individuals' suffering and wellbeing.

Chris McDermott spent 27 years working in mediation and conflict resolution before assuming the role of University Chaplain & Lead Faith Advisor at the University of Sussex in 2014. He recently retired from this role and is now completing his PhD which explores the phenomenon of dual religious belonging, through the lens of the philosopher, Gillian Rose. Chris, a Zen Buddhist and an Anglican Christian, talked about the practical implications of dual religious belonging and identity for a global sense of spirituality.



# Public Engagement, Impact and Knowledge

Dr Lior Birger presented a paper on her participatory research with refugees at the 12th European Conference for Social Work Research at Università Cattolica of Milan, Italy, 12th – 14th April 2023.

Anna Ridgewell presented a poster on her PhD research at the Education Studies Postgraduate Research Conference at the University of Warwick, UK, 21st April 2023.

Anna Ridgewell had a brief written piece on the subject of 'Your PhD in 100 Words' exhibited at the University of Sussex, May 2023, as part of a university-wide doctoral competition.

Anna Ridgewell had a poster about her PhD research shortlisted for the Sussex Festival of Doctoral Research 2023 Doctoral Poster competition, June 2023

Anna Ridgewell was awarded first prize for her ePoster presentation on her PhD work at the British Education Research Association (BERA) Annual Conference at Aston University, UK, 12th - 14th September 2023. See here for further information: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/bera-annual-conference-2023-poster-prize-presentation>.

## CIRW 2022/23 Publications

Birger, L. & Shoham, S. (accepted). Ethical considerations of “going public”: Public and media co-dissemination of research findings with refugees. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

Shoham, S., Birger, L., & Tesfalem, F. S. (in press). The afterlife of research: Reflections on co-dissemination methods in an anti-deportation struggle. In: A. Radziwinowiczówna (Ed.), *Methods in deportation research: Towards the power-knowledge approach*. Edward Elgar.

Birger, L. & Shoham, S. (April, 2023). The co-dissemination relationship in participatory research with refugees: Shifting roles and power relations. Paper presented at the 12th European Conference for Social Work Research, Milan, Italy.

Birger, L., Peled, E., Benyamini, Y., Goor, Y. & Sahar, Z. (2023). *אזירה יבצמב תונזב מישנל תואירב יתוריש נתמ*. Pregnancy and childbirth among women working in sex: Recommendations for best reproductive health care practice (position paper).

Ridgewell, A. (2023). Understanding the World in New Ways: A Reflection on the Journey Towards Appreciating the Intrinsic Value of Qualitative Research. *Sentio*, 5, 84-88.

Ridgewell, A. (2023, 12 Sep). Growing up Green: what value is placed on accessing outdoor environments across different childcare and educational settings? A doctoral study-in-progress. BERA Annual Conference.

Soye, E., Hilden, P. K., Andersen, A., & Watters, C. (2023). Recognising the newcomer: education policy and teaching practices in Norway and England. *Frontiers in Education*, 8, 1231633.

Spaas, C., Said-Metwaly, S., Skovdal, M., Langer Primdahl, N., Smith Jervelund, S., Kristian Hilden, P., Andersen, A.J., Opaas, M., Soye, E., Watters, C., Verelst, A., Derluyn, I., Colpin, H. & De Haenea, L., (2023). School-based Psychosocial Interventions' Effectiveness in Strengthening Refugee and Migrant Adolescents' Mental Health, Resilience, and Social Relations: A Four-country Cluster Randomized Study. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 32(3), 177.

# CIRW External Advisory Group

## Professor Jo Boyden

Jo Boyden is a former Professor of International Development at Oxford University and former Director of Director of Young Lives, which she led from 2005-2019. She has a PhD in Anthropology and a BSc in Social Anthropology from the University of London. Her research has mainly focused on child labour, children and political violence, and childhood poverty – particularly in bringing together academics, practitioners and policymakers to develop effective models and methods for supporting children, their families and their communities in situations of adversity.



## Professor Kevin Fenton



Kevin Fenton CBE is the London Regional Director at the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, Regional Public Health Director at NHS London and the Statutory Health Advisor to the Mayor of London. He is the current President of the United Kingdom Faculty of Public Health and holds Honorary Professorships with the University College London and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

## Dr Louise Montgomery

Louise Montgomery is a Senior Specialist in the Engagement, Recreation and Access team within the Chief Scientist Directorate at Natural England. She is also a guest lecturer and research co-supervisor for the Creative Health MASc at University College London (UCL). Louise completed her PhD at Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) on the impact of nature engagement on child wellbeing and educational attainment. She previously completed an integrated Masters in Zoology at the University of Glasgow, which included an internship at Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ) working alongside the EU Horizon 2020 project 'Sea Change'.



## Thurstine Basset



Thurstine Basset has recently stepped down from his role as CIRW Advisory Group member. We would like to thank him for his invaluable contribution to the work of the centre over the last few years.

# CIRW People

Director:

[Charles Watters](#) (Education and Social Work)

Research Fellow:

[Anna Ridgewell](#) (Education and Social Work)

Co-Director:

[Paul Statham](#) (Global Studies)

Affiliated Faculty:

[Dr Tish Marrable](#)

Tish Marrable is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Social Care in the School of Education and Social Work, a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a member of the Association of Palliative Care Social Workers. Her current research interests around autism, death and dying, and contemporary shamanic practices, are drawn from her own personal experience as well as from previous research work.

[Dr David Orr](#)

David Orr is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work in the School of Education and Social Work. His recent research projects have focused on adult safeguarding and self-neglect, global mental health, and representations of dementia in contemporary films and fiction. He is co-editor of the Palgrave Handbook of Sociocultural Perspectives on Global Mental Health (2017) and a member of the editorial board of Anthropology in Action.

[Professor Jeremy Niven](#)

Jeremy Niven is Dean of the Doctoral School. Much of his research focuses on mental health and wellbeing in students, particularly graduate students. This involves both publishing research papers and producing interventions. He is also developing an interest in wellbeing in psychiatric wards and prisons in the UK.

# Contact Information

For further information about the Centre, please visit our website (scan the QR code below).



You can also ask to be added to the CIRW mailing list by emailing Anna Ridgewell: [a.ridgewell@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:a.ridgewell@sussex.ac.uk).

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