



Registered Charity No. 1176524

## **Report from the Management Committee to the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Drop-In for Asylum Seekers and Refugees: 4<sup>th</sup> November 2020 (via Zoom)**

### **Committee**

Since the last AGM in August 2019, we are pleased that Mali has joined the committee. Kathleen resigned as Chair and as a Trustee in February and we would like to thank her for her contribution to FODI over several years. I also wish to thank all the Trustees for their work over the past year. Without them and our much-valued volunteers, whether at the Drop-in or the events at The Minster, the Women's group, welcoming new asylum seekers, helping with families or any of the other tasks, the Drop-In and other activities could not have taken place.

Sandra has now worked full time as FODI Manager for more than four years. The Trustees recognise that she puts in a significant amount of discretionary effort and hours above and beyond what may be expected of her role on paper. We are grateful for her dedication and commitment on behalf of our members. She has helped us to strengthen our links with partner organisations and to secure a range of funding bids.

### **The Drop-In**

Obviously Covid-19 has put a stop to what was previously our core activity, the Drop-In at St. Mary's Parish Centre, so what follows in the next paragraph relates to the period from August 2019 until March 2020.

The Drop In had an annual average attendance of 119 but in several weeks numbers reached 140+ attendees. FODI has continued to have a one stop shop at the drop in for clients to access a range of service providers including the following when they are able to attend: G4S, (later MEARS), Gentoo Housing association, SCC housing department, police CEOs, staff from the office of Julie Elliott MP, North East Law Centre and a solicitor from a Newcastle-based firm of immigration solicitors to provide access to legal advice. British Red Cross and the North of England Refugee Service both outreach into the Drop-In each week, to tackle problems surrounding access to NASS support, problems with housing and move on for new refugees. Occasional visits are also made by health teams, ICOS for employment help on their Workwise programme, Tyne and Wear fire service, Princes Trust and BME network groups.

We look forward to restarting the Drop-In when circumstances allow.

### **COVID-19 Response**

In April Sandra reported to Trustees as follows: "Since closing FODI face to face services I am operating to respond to the needs of our clients on a both day to day basis and more established weekly activities. I also advocate on behalf of our clients through local and national campaigns. I have maintained the website home page with basic information of our current services and other services vital to clients' needs – Fightback, Red Cross etc."

FODI set up an emergency response team to take on daily crises and calls for help from our clients. In conjunction with SCC, FODI had a team of volunteers able to visit those who needed urgent support in the way of food, shopping and later other essential items.

FODI manager set up a women's dance class online on Zoom (see below) and successfully applied for emergency funding for food and essentials from the Community Foundation National Emergency Trust, women's craft packs, family activity packs from WCDT – Wearside Community Development Trust, data top ups from the Police and Crime Commissioners fund and for such ongoing support as we would need in the months to come. Referrals were taken from all statutory services and networks of sharing and support were established with other VCS working to help asylum seekers in Sunderland.

FODI also responded using the Community Foundation Fund to an urgent request for emergency clothing for single men who had just arrived in the country and were put in hotels. We were also able to provide indoor and outdoor games for those with absolutely no possessions and nothing to do. This was gratefully received by the new arrivals and acknowledged with thanks by MEARS.

**FODI Office** After collecting large quantities of babies'/children's clothes and toys, the office risk assessment and signage was completed and we opened for collection by clients by appointment only in June. (The first floor was arranged as areas of clothing by age group on the tables– parent wears gloves and mask and only one person allowed in at a time). Clients arrived on time to collect clothing and the system worked very smoothly. Many people messaged to say how grateful they were for these items.

### **Drop-Ins at Sunderland Minster**

With the co-operation and support of Stuart and Angela Bain 5 events have been held at The Minster, the first on 29<sup>th</sup> July and the most recent on 15<sup>th</sup> October. As at the office, attendance was by appointment only and volunteers ensured compliance with Covid-19 regulations. The next is scheduled for 9<sup>th</sup> November.

At these events clothes, kitchenware, bedding and children's books and toys have been available. We also gave out uniform packs provided by the Churches Connect group. There has been a very successful collaboration with Social Chef which we have helped to fund with the Community Foundation National Emergency Trust money and now they have also received some emergency Covid-19 food money which they will use for FODI clients going forward. Social Chef have attended all these events

In addition, Roker Life will buy some new children's warm clothes to be given to the most needy or where there are gaps and will also buy a small stock of men's emergency clothes for new arrivals.

These Drop Ins have proved to be a hugely successful way of keeping in contact and supporting our clients.

### **Welcome and Orientation**

Until March 2020 all new arrivals were given their first welcome at the Drop In by volunteers with volunteer interpreters. G4s and Jomast (MEARS) give new arrivals a FODI Drop In leaflet to direct people for help and to register, but since March registrations have been difficult to administer. Again until March a meet and greet volunteer visited all the new families to offer practical and moral support.

### **A Volunteer Training and Induction Package**

This is carried out by Sandra to familiarise volunteers with the FODI charitable objects, the background to working with asylum seekers and refugees, and FODI policies and procedures. Sandra completed inductions for 12 volunteers during this period.

## **Women's Group**

Funding during 2019 came from the Tampon Tax Fund through Durham Community Foundation. These funds cover room hire, a crèche, art materials, some exercise classes and bus fares. Additional funding came from Sunderland Partnership for a joint project with SANGINI that ran from Jan -March 2020.

The women's group has successfully run an exercise class from 10-11am each week provided by "Be active Be fit", followed by a craft or cooking activity. The volunteers and women themselves organised much of the cooking sessions using the wide-ranging cultural expertise of the women. They did a papier mache and decorating project and produced information shoe boxes on their own countries for a display for Refugee week. An embroidery project was a big success, helped by some donations from a local store alongside our purchases. Those with considerable skills in this area did peer teaching. The SANGINI Art project was a Connecting Communities project where the two groups joined to do an art and craft project on wet and needle felting. Sangini members are a truly international group from diverse backgrounds and enjoyed meeting and working with the FODI women. This work continued after the lockdown and was a therapeutic focus for those who needed something to do during the first months of full lockdown.

## **Women's Group links**

FODI also started work with the Regional Refugee Forum on a new project 'Learning Communities' where workshops and discussions centre on the voice of asylum seekers and refugees finding solutions to their problems as well as being given direction.

FODI joined a new emerging group called "Listening to Women's Voices" Its remit is to represent the voices of all women in Sunderland. FODI clients were well represented at its launch and we were able to share film of our women's project and the dance project "Who do you want to meet?".

## **Zoom women's group**

The women's group switched to Zoom at the beginning of lockdown and there has been a very good response from those who have the right type of phone or tablet to log on. We have been able to offer top up money for data. We make time to chat and help people feel they can share and support each other. Tracey West ( FODI FOYF project contemporary dance teacher) has been doing a weekly dance session for 45 minutes which the participants really love and it helps with both exercise and relaxation-

After lockdown was lifted, and outdoor exercise classes resumed, Sandra and Tracey moved the dance session back into the real world and more precisely to Mowbray Park where social distancing was easily achieved. This continued until October when she has relocated to her premises in Eagle Building. We thank Tracey for her enthusiasm and creativity.

## **Partnerships**

We continue to work closely with many other local organisations: Action Foundation, Fight-back, NERS, Red Cross, Roker Life, CEED, ICOS (International Community of Sunderland) the local police, local health and mental health services, MESMAC, Crossings, Sunderland BME network, colleagues in many local churches, City of Sanctuary, Young Asian Voices, Sangini, Tyne and Wear Fire services, GENTOO and others.

## **ESOL**

We maintain a strong partnership with Action Language. Until March we referred all new arrivals to them if they need ESOL and one member of their team visited the Drop In each week to meet new clients and arrange testing. Since March we have advertised Action

Language Zoom classes at our Minster events and we have seen some of our clients participating. We also work with Sunderland College to assist with registration for those in country for 6+ months.

**Gym, Swimming and Soft Play Activities for children:** Until March an average of 40 people per week took advantage of the opportunity to keep fit both physically and mentally by visiting the local gym facilities, this is funded by FODI CCG activities fund. The Aquatic Centre has been very supportive, giving us free family swim passes, free swimming days, and some free soft play vouchers for children.

Gyms and swimming pools were closed for some months. We have monitored reopening schedules and have resumed distribution of gym and swimming vouchers (mainly the former as only one swimming pool is currently open and is not centrally located)

**Sunderland AFC:** We welcomed the 10 tickets that SAFC kindly gives us for their home games and one of our volunteers organises attendance at these match days. Obviously no spectators are permitted currently but we have kept in contact with the club.

**Football:** Some of our clients played football with YAV on a less formal basis using one of their drop-in sessions on Wednesday evenings and Saturdays. Funding just received from the Barrow Cadbury Trust will enable further training and 5 a side sessions.

### **Community Project: Roker Life**

FODI continued to work with Roker Life based at Roker URC: a project that aims to bring the Roker community into contact with asylum seekers in Sunderland through children's holiday activities, gardening projects and Social Chef.

**Social Chef:** David Robinson worked with a small group of adults to do recipe sharing over a six-week course. He also joined our team a few times at the Drop In when we cooked a hot meal for our clients.

Since March Roker Life and Social Chef have provided fruit and vegetable boxes, some ready baked goods, home baking packs for children and toiletries at our events at The Minster (see above)

### **BSBT Funding**

**This was awarded to FODI for a schools project entitled "Sanctuary- is it a right?"**

This fund from the counter extremism programme was aimed at enhancing children's knowledge and understanding of asylum seekers and refugees and why people have to leave their homes and seek sanctuary and what experiences they have here when they arrive in the UK.

FODI engaged an experienced teacher and writer to facilitate these sessions alongside an experienced teacher volunteer and volunteer asylum seeker and refugee speakers. By hearing directly from refugees themselves, children and teachers were able to increase their empathy through personal connection. We are grateful to those of our clients who volunteered to take part in this programme.

We delivered 25 lessons and assemblies to 810 children in primary and secondary schools in Sunderland which responded to our invitation letter to join our project. We had excellent support from the staff and overwhelmingly positive responses from the children. A toolkit for use in school by teachers has been produced. We are fortunate to have received further in-kind funding support from BSBT to allow us to make films to accompany this toolkit in the future so that teachers can work independently if they choose.

### **Princes Trust young people's programme at the Fire Station**

Three asylum seekers aged between 16 and 25 took part in three different 13-week Prince's Trust projects at Marley Park and Farringdon Fire stations providing an outward bound residential, CV development, work experience and community project development. It afforded excellent opportunities to aim for some form of integration and FODI facilitated two of the community placements through gardening projects at Roker Life and Galley's Gill.

**Media Savvy** worked very successfully in the office during the drop-in by providing tailor made IT teaching and assistance to small numbers of asylum seekers who had a particular interest in graphics.

### **Feeding Families Christmas hampers.**

This charity provided us with 40 hampers for families at Christmas.

### **Knit for Peace**

We were very fortunate to receive two deliveries from Knit for Peace that gives out hand-made knitted items, clothes, accessories and blankets donated by volunteers located throughout the country. The most recent delivery was 9 sacks in response to the pandemic.

**Lush** The LUSH shop gave us donations of a number of products and offered to help us by hosting FODI for a weekend in their Sunderland Shop for their Charity pot scheme. This was due to happen just at the time of lockdown so was postponed, but Lush provided us with a range of products which were given out at one of our Minster events.

### **Family Trips**

FODI had a family trip to Tweddle Farm in August 2019 which was well attended and enjoyed by all participants especially given the clear sunny day that allowed families to enjoy the outdoors and share a picnic together.

### **Penrith Project Collaboration**

FODI has continued the partnership work with Penrith and Eden Network. The project encourages new refugees to go and live and work in Penrith where labour force is needed and an understanding and welcoming community exists. The group has had a further two 5-day Penrith Experience projects focusing on English for employment as well as craft, social and outward-bound activities. A number of FODI clients took part in these and met other former FODI clients who now live and work in Penrith. Our clients were all very positive about the experience and were impressed with the welcome they received from this community.

**Christmas Party:** Our Christmas Party is always popular, and 200 people attended for hot food, children's entertainer and gifts all round. We were funded for this by several very generous donations and the use of unallocated funds.

### **Bike project**

We were very grateful for a grant from Quakers of Britain to enable us to repair and do safety checks on donated bikes and give out locks and lights to adults and helmets for children. We recruited two new volunteers during the period and the Sunderland Quakers built a very large shed in their grounds for us to store and repair donations.

FODI has given out 52 bikes in this period and has carried out over 75 repairs on previously donated bikes or those belonging to or given to asylum seekers in their communities. These have all made a significant difference to those receiving them. Not only in improving

their access around the city given their extremely low income and the prohibitive cost of transport, but also their physical fitness and mental well-being.

All these bikes were donated by Recyke yer bike in Newcastle or individuals in Sunderland. We have a good working partnership with Recyke yer Bike who also offered reduced cost training for volunteers. Unfortunately, the course was meant to be in April 2020 and was postponed due to Covid 19.

Access to the shed provided by Sunderland Quakers resumed in July. Since then we have started to receive bikes again. Our much-valued volunteer has repaired several and distribution of bikes to clients has resumed.

## **Refugee Week**

Inevitably Refugee Week in Sunderland looked rather different to previous years. FODI hosted Sunderland's Refugee Week programme on our website and this was shared around all of Sunderland and on various social media platforms.

The week was still a success in its virtual form and we had very good feedback to our webpage content.

There was still the Walk of Sanctuary- socially distanced but as impactful as ever.

We had the hugely popular and visually effective Coronaquilt of images for Sunderland (taken from the original idea at Art Refuge) compiled by Billy Broad from Gentoo. This showed all the submissions from asylum seekers and our partners during lockdown and included a creative gallery of the art and crafts project from the collaboration with Sangini funded by WCDT, Cultural spring and the Community Foundation..

We also had the very powerful telling of personal asylum stories on video, recorded and rendered by Claire of Skimstone Arts, from Claudia and Abraham. As they were also widely shared there was much positive feedback.

The end of week party zoom was at least a good get together and meant that former volunteers from hundreds of miles away could join us.

## **Interpreting**

FODI uses a number of our volunteers as interpreters who use their language skills to help others. As you can see from this report, this is vital to many of our members. If you may be able to help with interpreting, please talk to Sandra.

## **Move On**

Several of our volunteers work tirelessly to assist those who have gained status to go through the difficult transition process and settle here in Sunderland or move on to other cities where they go to join relatives, friends or to look for work.

We refer clients who have been given leave to remain to the ICOS Workwise programme to assist them into future work and training.

## **We have been invited to speak to many organisations during the year**

FODI members have spoken to a Nifties group in Washington, a Prince's Trust group at Marley Park Fire Station and Level 2 students of History and Politics at the University of Sunderland.

**On behalf of the Committee**, I wish to express our very sincere thanks to all the individuals and organisations who have helped us this last year, whether as volunteers, attendees at the Drop-In, or donors of gifts or money, especially our main funders. We have been supported in the year under review by the NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group, the Lloyds Bank Foundation, Tampon Tax Fund Durham Community Foundation, BSBT (Building Stronger Britain Together), Quakers of Britain,

Community Foundation Tyne and Wear ' National Emergency trust', Police and Crime Commisioner Fund, WCDT (Wearside Community Development Trust), Cultural Spring and Sunderland City Council, without all of whom FODI would not exist.  
I hope that we shall have your continued support going forward.

### **Challenges**

- Meeting the needs of all our clients in uncertain times, with another period of lockdown possible.
- Adapting to changing Covid-19 regulations and ensuring that we provide as good a service as we possibly can.
- Ensuring that when restrictions end we are ready to resume our previous level of service
- Producing and implementing a strategic plan to ensure the development of FODI.
- Working in partnership with other voluntary groups.
- Responding to changing circumstances for clients after lockdown eg people with status being required to leave asylum seeker accommodation.
- Appointing a new Treasurer.

### **FODI Committee members 2020**

Zeinab Cummings, Abraham Eiluorior, Felicity Livsey, Stephen Newman, Jane Nikolarakis, Mali Saha, Tolosa Tadesse, Zara Zuma.