



# FRIENDS OF THE DROP-IN

## Newsletter



ISSUE NUMBER THREE | JANUARY | 2014



F.O.D.I. officially began on 30/11/2011 when its constitution was signed. It was the vision of a group of people who had supported the Drop-In for many years and wished to expand on the work already done there by opening new funding opportunities which would allow more activities to take place. These activities would be chosen by the membership (attendees of the Drop-In). We hope this newsletter will show a little of what has been achieved.

We are proud to announce that F.O.D.I. achieved charitable status last year and our registered charity number is 1153057

### F.O.D.I. Mission Statement:

To improve the mental health and well-being of the asylum-seeking and refugee community of Sunderland, lessening their social isolation and promoting their integration into the wider community, by supporting and extending the activities of the Drop-In currently run on Wednesday afternoons.

### Objectives:

1. To provide opportunities for the clients of the Drop-In to participate in wider societal activities of a suitable nature.
2. To foster closer links into the wider community, providing opportunities for clients to link into this.
3. To work in partnership with other local organisations/groups to further this aim.

Our contact email is :

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could arrange sponsorship either for their own organisations or for City of Sanctuary; refugees and sanctuary-seekers could simply enjoy the walk. We have estimated that about 50 people took part this year and it has been proposed that this is repeated next year with people from other parts of the region joining in.



### 19th June 2013 - Stories Of Sanctuary

This was the launch event for City of Sanctuary was held at 7.00 p.m. until 9.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 19th June, in St. Mary's Church Hall. A few people shared their stories of what it has been like to seek sanctuary with a number of people coming to the event who, though probably generally wishing them well, had no real understanding of the difficulties of life as an asylum-seeker. Stories from some of the people who have supported them: people like the Red Cross, Friends of the Drop-In, etc. were also heard. The idea was to get people to sign up to the idea of City of Sanctuary, and to pledge specific and concrete support for the movement. The Reverend Chris Howson distributed a form which was designed to be used for this purpose at the launch and before that with relevant people and organisations i.e. those who can do

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## Refugee Week 2013

This year we were a little more ambitious and planned events over the whole week to celebrate Refugee Week and to launch Sunderland City of Sanctuary. The report on events is given below.

17th June 2013 - Walk For Sanctuary  
A Walk for Sanctuary, which was from the Minster in Sunderland to the reporting centre in North Shields. There was support for those undertaking this walk, and cut-price ferry crossings had been negotiated. People from organisations

something for asylum seekers and refugees. There was food prepared by various asylum seekers/refugees using recipes from their countries as well as that provided for the event. In addition to this there was musical entertainment provided. It is estimated that over 100 people attended this event.

## 21st. June 2013 - Showing of Film "I am Nasrine" at Sunderland University Theatre

'I Am Nasrine', written and directed by Tina Gharavi in 2012, was shown at the David Puttnam Media centre at Sunderland University. The film, nominated at the 66th British Academy Film Awards, depicted the struggle and fate of a young Iranian brother and sister seeking sanctuary in Britain. After the film there was a lively discussion of the issues raised.

FODI would like to thank GENTOO for their ASPIRE grant, which funded the film screening.

## 22nd. June 2013 - Refugee Week Event

We once again held an event to celebrate Refugee Week at the Sunderland Museum and Wintergardens in the Jack Crawford Suite. We had stalls, music and many activities for all ages to enjoy. We also had displays which were designed to dispel some of the myths around the asylum process. Our volunteers were there to assist, as always, to ensure everyone had an enjoyable and informative day. The activities ran from 12 until 4 p.m. We had food and soft drinks to sustain the attendees during the event. We had over 200 recorded attendees (slightly less than last year) but feedback was very positive.



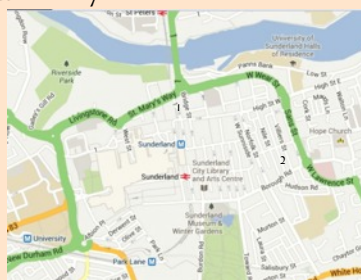
## City Library 17th to 22nd June 2013

During the week there was a display on the notice boards in the library providing pictorial and written information around asylum. Information was provided there for the events taking place during the week. Our volunteers who manned the stand reported that a good number of people took the time to look at the exhibits and take away information. We at F.O.D.I. find that learning about other cultures enriches our lives and those of our service users and it is our hope that such events as this will also enrich others' lives and generate a little understanding to counter the negatives we see in the media.

## We have opened a small office.....

At 23A Bridge House – just across the road from the Drop-in. We are using this for meetings, training, language classes and social sessions. Our thanks go to 'Bizspace' and especially Lynne Oliver for arranging this under their charity initiative.

At the social sessions, people can play cards, dominoes, chess, etc; or watch DVD's or old films on VHS. Service users are notified of classes etc at the drop-in. Other uses of the office will be publicised as necessary.



1 - Drop-In 2 - NERS (Refugee Service)

Sunderland has been a City for 21 years now. Work continues to turn Sunderland into a City of Sanctuary, which means, at root, it is trying to make Sunderland a welcoming place for asylum seekers and refugees. We have seen many individual acts of kindness towards asylum seekers, some of them incredibly generous, and are looking to formalise and extend the warmth some people already show.

Friends of the Drop-in has no paid staff. We would like to say a big thank you to all of the volunteers who help to make the drop-in run.

Here are just some of those who help:



## Equality and Diversity Week at Sunderland College

FODI was invited to attend the event in December. We took a display to each of the campuses and at least one volunteer was there to talk to people each day. Our aim was to make students and staff more aware of the truth of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees. We were pleased that staff and students were interested to know more and we gave away many copies of "Myth busters" to reinforce what had been said. Several potentially useful contacts were made with staff at the various campuses and we hope that more invitations to talk to groups will result.





## Sporting Activities

### Football

Playing the beautiful game.....

We “teamed” up with Young Asian Voices ( long-established and respected in this City, but not just young and not just Asian!) to enable some of our asylum-seekers and refugees to join their team and play for, and train, with them.

It's been very successful, and the multi-national and multi-talented team have done very well, including competing in a national competition in Leicester, where they were amongst the top teams. Proudly, they had one of their asylum-seeking players declared Man of the Tournament (not surprising, as he used to play for his country's national team!) and Ram, the enthusiastic manager of YAV, told us that YAV was the most diverse team in the competition.

We would like to acknowledge and thank YAV for the welcome given to our members, and the fitness level they've achieved with them. One of the big issues for asylum-seekers is about how to keep themselves busy and how to find something to take their minds off the long wait during the asylum process, and YAV have contributed greatly to this. Thanks, guys.

### Access to sport- Partnership with the Aquatic Centre

Many of the asylum seekers and refugees who attend the Drop-In had expressed interest in attending the gym, but could not afford the fees.

FODI volunteer Jane approached the Aquatic Centre and since September has worked with them to organise Lifecards and Gym passes for service users. So far we have provided gym access for 45 men. We were lucky to be able to take advantage of their special offers of 6 weeks for the price of 4 and this includes use of the pool, gym and exercise classes.

The sports and leisure advisor of the Aquatic Centre, Elizabeth Meek has been very helpful when enrolling our large groups and has praised them on their excellent behaviour and enthusiasm when using the Centre. We have also been sent some free swim vouchers for use in the centre.

The gym has proved very popular, with a waiting list of enrolments for after Xmas. Those who have been using it said the exercise helps them forget some of their problems and they have made some new friends.

## Days out with Asylum Seekers and Refugee Families

### Tweddle Farm Trip

On August the 9th, a group of 26 adults and children from the Drop-In visited Tweddle Animal Farm, near Hartlepool, accompanied by FODI volunteers Jane, Jim and Etor. We met outside St Mary's at 10.15 and travelled by coach to the farm. We were blessed with a beautiful sunny day.

The children and adults first visited the large barns and saw the smaller animals, such as sheep goats, rabbits and birds up close. They were able to pet and feed them with special food from the shop. There was lots of fun to be had in the soft play area, and on the mini tractors. After a packed lunch and ice creams for all, the fun continued with a barrel ride pulled by a large tractor, excitement on the go cart track and visits to the larger animals such as donkeys, horses and llamas. There were loads of opportunities for indoor and outdoor play. We arrived back at the Drop-In about 4.30 when all the children were given a small souvenir from the Farm. It was a great day out and one of the parents said: 'We should do more things like this, as it brings people together.'



### Sun, sand, seals and starfish.....

On 31<sup>st</sup> October, a group of mothers, children and the occasional dad went from Sunderland to the Tyneside Aquarium. The children were excited as soon as the bus pulled away – something different to do in the school holidays. The Aquarium was bigger than we anticipated; and there was a lot of fun oooooohing and aaaahing at some of the creatures there. The Sea Life Centre put on a special session for our children, where they got to examine and hold rock pool creatures, such as starfish, crabs, etc. And much arguing about whether pipefish were real or fake.....

We went to see the seals being fed, and performing for the entertainment of all. Then into the shop to buy a little memento each, and off to the beach.

The weather was kind to us. Considering it was the last day of October, and the darkness would be gathering in just a couple of hours for all the ghosts and ghouls of Halloween to come forth, it was warm and sunny on the Long Sands at Tynemouth, and some paddling and running on the sand and cart-wheeling in the freedom of not being in the house, ensued.

Then home again, just in time for tea.



### Black History Week and Holocaust Memorial Day Events

We supported events organised by the Community Librarian - Jolene Dunbar - by working with school students in a range of venues across the city; these ranged from story telling sessions through working on awareness of slavery and an African drumming session at the central library. Participants included Etor, Adil, Karim, Awad, Florence and Nkechi. the African drumming session was led by Mensah supported by John, Frederick and Carlos.

#### Drumming

In Black History Week, Jolene Dunbar at the central library, invited us to hold a drumming session on the Saturday morning in the foyer. Jim Fox organised this and with drums borrowed from the Minster our guys provide an extremely enjoyable morning. Many people stopped to listen and to try their hand at it, from 4 year olds, right through the age range to the definitely mature. They expressed their appreciation. People were dancing and clapping. Great fun was had by all. Our thanks go to everyone who took part.



#### HMD Storytelling Event

Hadi, Kojo, Patrick, Naveed, Samir and Salah shared their experiences of seeking asylum to a very attentive and visibly moved audience. Received feedback from Jolene regarding this afternoon's event said it was really positive with any people wishing that we 'd be given more time. There were 25 people at the session and there were comments regarding how moving an experience it was. Many wished that there were more events like this and wished that more people knew about the issues surrounding asylum seekers/refugees.

Many thanks to all who took part and helped to make this session so memorable.



## Christmas Party

We were lucky enough that Santa once again found just a little time out of his busy schedule to call in to distribute the presents (generously donated by the Salvation Army, The Quakers meeting, and some individuals) to the children. Our thanks for the food provided by Ali Babas restaurant which was greatly appreciated by all. The standard was very high as usual. This year we had a very large attendance; many people we had not seen for a while took time out to attend. All of our service users, young and old, received a present. There was music and a drumming session enhanced by impromptu dance performances by several people.

### Funding for event

Inspiration funding from Sunderland Childrens centres, donation from the Northumbria Police charity fund and face painter costs donated by Tyne and Wear Fire service.



## BUDDY SYSTEM

Are you worried about attending immigration in North Shields?

If you are, please tell a volunteer at the Drop-In on Wednesdays. We are setting up a buddy system which means that someone from the Drop-In will contact you before you visit immigration and then ring you afterwards to make sure you are OK. They can also contact your solicitor and your family or friends if you have any problems at immigration.

F.O.D.I. will need your contact information and that of any solicitor who is actively dealing with your case so that we can help in the event of a problem. There is an application form for this scheme and you will get help from a volunteer if you want to participate. All volunteers are covered by our confidentiality policy and will not give out any information without your consent. If you have concerns you can discuss them with a volunteer at the Drop-In.

Reporting is a legal requirement and North Shields will not accept many reasons for non-attendance. The only one that is routinely accepted is due to illness and even this must be proven by a letter or sick note from your doctor. If you do not attend for a while you will be placed on a watch list with the police. Non-attendance can also have an effect on any application for support. We are giving this information to assist you not to frighten you.

We are working to extend the buddy system to assist the most vulnerable people who are homeless and have no support by keeping track of them and offering what help we can. We are constantly working towards this but people need to sign up for this and keep in contact with us to make it happen.



Enormous thanks to all the knitters in the Ravelry group.....

Which sent us a huge amount of amazing knitted things for the refugees and asylum seekers here in Sunderland! The items were snapped up and are being sported round the streets of Sunderland – we’re becoming a city of style! Ravelry is a group that’s a bit like facebook for knitters and crocheters, and groups form themselves. The group that knitted for us is from all over UK and even as far afield as Canada and USA! Wow! We are still stunned by their generosity and craftsmanship!

### Special Thanks

None of the things contained in this newsletter would be possible without the many people who help us. We would like to thank our funders, the Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group and The Northern Rock Foundation; and our generous supporters from St. Chad’s, Streetcare, Durham Quakers’ Meeting many individuals, St. Vincent de Paul Society, and our wonderful partners at Hylton College who provide soup, free haircuts, and sports opportunities for the people at the Drop-In. Thanks also to the funders of the projects we ran this year. And, of course, the volunteers without whom we cannot even open the doors!

Thank you all very much.



South of Tyne and Wear

