



# FRIENDS OF THE DROP-IN

## Newsletter



ISSUE NUMBER six | JULY 2015



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 :

friendsofthedropin@yahoo.com

Some of members took part in the walk for sanctuary organised by the reverend Chris Howson on behalf of Sunderland City Of Sanctuary.



You can view the full story published in the Sunderland Echo by following this link.

<http://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/community/supporters-step-out-to-highlight-plight-of-refugees-1-7311293>

## Contents



Refugee Week  
Volunteer Awards



FODI at University of  
Sunderland



FODI Office  
Jack of All Trades Article  
FODI at The Bunker



Access to Sport  
Durham and Beamish Trips



Cinema Visits  
Thomas - Boxing Events  
A Success Story



Thanks to Funders and Partners



Amy Pearson - A Volunteer In  
Uganda

## Refugee Week

Due to funding constraints FODI did not do as much as it usually does for Refugee Week. We did have a stall at the library all week. Jim did a display at the library with photos of FODI activities, myth busters and Red Cross leaflets, raising awareness of Refugee and asylum issues. Amnesty International also brought some leaflets for our display. Jim said that most of the material which could be taken away from the display by the public was gone.

## Volunteer Awards

On April 29th, the Sunderland BME network held its first ever award ceremony at St Gabriel's Church. We are very proud to say that FODI received an award in the category of 'Volunteer Recognition' and this was accepted by Etor Quaysie, a long serving member of the FODI Committee. Etor also received an award for his individual contribution to the BME community, as did Jane Nikolarakis. Unfortunately, Jane could not attend as she was away on holiday, so the award was presented to Geoff, Jane's partner and member of FODI.

[Continued on next page:](#)

Well done to all volunteers and FODI members who have contributed to the success and recognition of our organisation in Sunderland.



### Second Invitation to FODI from University of Sunderland to speak to students.

After last year's success, when five people from FODI spoke at the university, Dr Peter Hayes, lecturer in History and Politics, once again invited us to speak.

This year four men and two women volunteered to participate in the event: Abraham Grace, Saleh, Surafiel, Adeola and Sara a member of Crossings. During the one hour lecture slot, Abraham, from Nigeria, gave a slide presentation on the Asylum and Appeals System, and Sara told her personal story.

After coffee, all participants formed a panel and answered students' very varied questions in two separate hour-long seminar sessions. At the end of the sessions, some students thanked us personally for helping to clarify the important distinctions between the reasons for those claiming asylum and other migrants.

Below is a 'thank you' letter from Dr Hayes:

Thank you very much indeed for arranging for our visiting speakers yesterday. This was a fantastic session for the students, and I learned a lot too. I was very impressed with the lectures. Abraham's presentation was, I thought, most professional, and Sara was a tremendously compelling speaker. When it came to the seminars, it was great how every member of the panel engaged so well with the questions posed by the students. What they shared was of great interest, and was often moving. I think the class really got a good sense of the human stories behind the media headlines. Even better, not only did they share their own stories, but the seminar speakers also engaged in larger political questions - and were very well informed in these matters. So all in all I cannot thank you all enough. It was obvious how impressed the students were, you saw that well enough.

Walking back with one of the students after lunch, she was told me how the session had really been an eye-opener for her, which I think sums things up pretty well.

Best Wishes  
Peter.





We continue to operate 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.

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.

We couldn't do it without all the people who help.....

We run the drop-in providing socialising opportunities, food, clothing when we have some; access to the Internet, to football, gym and the cinema; to English conversation classes, free haircuts, outings, help in accessing services such as outreach solicitors, housing, etc - oh, and so much more.

Thanks are due to our main funders (Northern Rock Foundation and Clinical Commissioning Group) of course; but also to the many who help us with donations and services : Hylton College, The Quakers, Streetcare, a Zakat gift from a group of Muslim ladies , The St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Jill Franklin Trust, St. Chad's, The United Reform Church, SAFC, Chris Howson at the Interfaith Centre, several individuals who do not wish to be named but have generously helped us over the year, J. Barbour who donated several winter coats, Red Cross, Brar & Co,

(these are in no particular order, and I just hope I've not missed anyone!)

The individuals are too numerous to list : but to those who make the food, wash and tidy up, give collective and individual English speaking classes, run the trips, organise the film and gym visits, help those who are in need and in despair, keep the IT right so that people can access e-mail, check things out on the internet, etc., keep things going and developing : a massive thank you.

Jack of all trades.....

We had a good look at ourselves, and decided we are not experts in everything, by any means. So, we have been working towards building good working relationships with those who are. We very much welcome the help and knowledge of some of those who have the expertise:

Action Foundation, who are moving into Sunderland, have an excellent record of housing newly-granted refugees, and helping them to find their feet in what is to them a new society, and of teaching English to those who need to learn;

Newcastle Law Centre, who complement the existing outreach legal aid solicitors Brar & Co. by working with other cases where no legal aid is available;

British Red Cross, who work to help asylum seekers on some aspects of their cases, and who operate a tracing service for those who have lost touch with their families;

Sunderland Initial Response Team, who have given valuable help in working with some of clients with difficult mental health problems;

Provisioning of food parcels: People like Keith; St. Chad's Church and, of course, the St. Vincent de Paul Society help in this very necessary task;

Paul from the civilian police liaison branch, who helps with police matters;

Mesmac, which supports us and our LGBT clients

And there are many more from whom we seek to learn, and who give us and our clients their valuable expertise – Thank You!

## FODI at The Bunker

For 3 weeks The Bunker played host to members of FODI (friends of the drop in), delivering music workshops ranging from drum lessons to production lessons and even to participants teaching The Bunker staff a thing or 2. The sessions started out originally with member of The Bunker attending the drop in service held at St. Mary's parish centre but after the first taster session both groups wanted more. With the demand being there and the resources readily available we decided to roll out the 3 week project here at The Bunker. Our sessions included, guitar tuition, drum tuition, DJ skills and production lessons. The first session was based around the Djembe with a drum circle, we thought we would be the ones teaching but we were mistaken. Members from the FODI group showed exceptional Djembe skills and managed to teach the staff here at The Bunker how to play music from various cultures. As the sessions went by we started to learn about other skills people have such as piano, one member demonstrated great skill on the piano and could of happily sat all day playing away. The greatest achievement was from Ari, he had managed to produce his own hip-hop track using an Ipad then recorded his vocals to accompany the track using logic. He then got the courage to play his track at the drop in service to everyone who attended. The end of the course has not marked the end of our involvement with FODI, we will be returning in the future to develop those music skills and maybe The Bunker will be able to click there hands in that peculiar way.

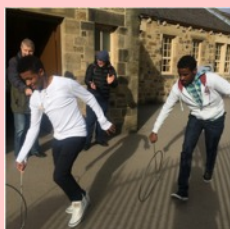


## Access to sport- Partnership with the Aquatic Centre

FODI continues to work with the Aquatic Centre , which is now run by an organisation called Everyone Active, the consumer brand of Sports Leisure Management Ltd. We provide Everyone Active cards ( formerly Lifecards ) for our members and FODI now has its own Gym and Swim vouchers printed by Everyone Active.Vouchers are distributed to FODI members who are regular users of the gym and pool.The Raich Carter Centre can now also be used with FODI vouchers, which is a bonus for FODI members who live south of the river. Elizabeth Meek, who now works at Hetton and Houghton Leisure Centre ,has been very helpful with the changeover to Everyone Active. The gym and pool have proved very popular, and those using the Aquatic Centre say the exercise helps them forget some of their problems and make new friends. The vouchers are particularly useful for those who do not get cash support and who would not otherwise have access to sport. We have also provided soft play vouchers for children of FODI members, so they can play to their hearts' content in a safe, warm and colourful environment.

## Beamish Visit March 2015

On a cold day in March we hired a bus and visited Beamish Open Air Museum, which has buildings from around the North East from about 100 years ago. There were people, dressed from that time, who explained what would have happened in the Bank, the Baker's, the Masonic Hall. Everyone was very helpful and welcoming and happy to have their pictures taken with us. We particularly enjoyed the School and were shocked by the cane. Some of our guys became very skilful bowling the hoops in the school playground. It certainly kept them warm. Another very interesting place was the dentist, with his gas and very primitive tools. We had a very good lunch. The staff were great and we warmed up being inside. The tram and bus journeys were great fun and we finished off with a visit to the miners' cottages finding out about their lives. Many thanks to Jane and Jim who organised the day.



## DURHAM TRIP

On a cold, grey day at the end of March, Jim and Jane took 26 FODI members to visit the historic city of Durham. We met at the Interchange and got on a local bus, which took about an hour and passed through some nice countryside. We walked up to Palace green through cobbled streets and the amazing Durham Cathedral came into view. We visited inside, where we learned a little about the architecture and history of the cathedral. We sat quietly for a short service, where refugees and sanctuary seekers all over the world were remembered and prayed for in these turbulent times.

After a short lunch and warm up, we visited the indoor market, which had a great variety of stalls. Fortified by lunch , we took a walk along the river and saw the various sculptures, stopping for numerous photos along the way. The sun even came out briefly! We took the bus back and everyone agreed that Durham was a wonderful place, which they would love to return to.





## Thomas Essomba Boxing Match

Fight took place at Rainton Meadows Arena on Sunday 8th March 2015. It was a fight of 8 rounds for the International Bronze Master Title held by his opponent, Issac Quaye, originally from Ghana but now living in London. Thomas won on points and the belt passed to him.

Many of Thomas's friends and fans attended his professional fight including his English tutor.



## CINEMA

Last year we decided to trial the use of cinema vouchers to give people access to the cinema now and again. As prices for the vouchers have increased, we decided it was better value for money to arrange adult trips to the cinema on Saverday Tuesdays, where tickets are much cheaper. Members will be informed of proposed dates and tickets will be purchased for individuals on the day. Sunderland Empire runs a Juniors Saturday film club for parents and children with very cheap tickets and parents have been informed about this. Please inform Jane if you are interested in going, so that we can monitor anticipated costs.

One of the Drop In's regular visitors Thomas Essomba, will be boxing at the Stadium of Light on July 5<sup>th</sup>, at an event hosted by local promoter Phil Jeffries.

Thomas, 27, who was a captain for his native Cameroon during the 2012 Olympic Games, will be fighting in the flyweight division, against Hungary's Robert Kanalas.

The fight will also be for the newly created British Promoters Association Classic Challenge Flyweight Title.

Often we hear stories about boxers overcoming great struggles to make it in the sport. Thomas sought Asylum in the UK, having stayed in the country following the 2012 games. Happily he now has refugee status.

"This is my third time fighting at the stadium and it will be the first time I have done 10 rounds," he said.

"I started boxing aged 12 in Cameroon, and then after I went to the 2012 games in London, and they I stay here," he said.

He started training at Bo's Boxing in Sunderland, and says he's ready for the big night, despite having trouble finding opponent for the bill.

"I think the guys over here are scared off me, I don't know, maybe they saw my career as an Olympian.

"For me I'm ready to fight anyone at flyweight or super-flyweight."

(Article was supplied by our volunteer Matty Waddell following his interview with Thomas)

I am pleased to announce that Thomas won again. We wish him continued success in the future.

## Dr. Mahmoud Hardan - A success story

"I am a UK educated doctor from Iraq. I have many medical and scientific papers accepted in world well-known conferences inside the UK and abroad. Recently, I have two studies accepted, presented and published online by Evidence Linve I 5 in Oxford last April.

My papers impressed all audience who attended in Oxford among them, scientists from the UK, States and continents. Paper highlighted the last Ebola outbreak and suggested the best drug to develop as a prophylactics measure for any future outbreak.

More than 250 delegates were attended and saw my scientific works. They were reflected variety of professional backgrounds such as Medical, public health and publishers. Currently, I am working on a wide variety of topics to be displayed in right time.

FODI's staff have hugely supported me financially and logistically. They were determined to keep me in my academic field that kindness I massively admire"

## Welcome to Sunderland!

We operate a “meet and greet” scheme through City of Sanctuary. We train volunteers, and find people who can speak the many languages we encounter (to the best of our ability – any Oromo speakers out there??) . The dispersal centre for Sunderland is in Wakefield, and the staff and some volunteers there try to send us information on when someone is coming into the City, so that we can plan to meet them, show them round the essential places to know (post office, library, drop-in, GP surgeries, etc) and try to help on any problems people have when they first come here.

We found that many people arriving here didn't really know much about Sunderland, and were nervous about being sent to somewhere they'd not heard of. We now have material about Sunderland in the Dispersal centre, so that people can know a bit about our City; and some of our asylum-seekers worked on a video with the students and staff at Hylton College, and one of its purposes is that we send the finished item down to Wakefield dispersal centre, so people there can see some of our City, showing them that's really nice up here. This has now been done. Some of the contributors speak frankly about how they viewed Sunderland before they got here :”Eh? Where's that? Don't want to go” was one lady's first reaction. But she continues and says that she now loves the place, the people, the beach, etc. but, alas, not the cold when it is cold.

Of course, some people come to Sunderland not through Wakefield – dispersals within the region. We can't plan in advance for that, but we try to help them when they make their way to the Drop-in. And most people who are here are wonderful supports to their newly-arrived colleagues, bringing them in to us, and showing them where to shop, etc.

The meet and greet team can be contacted through FODI, and at the Drop-in each week.

Thanks to all of those who help us in what we are seeking to do.



### A FODI Volunteer in Uganda written by Amy Pearson

In March I, a FODI volunteer, travelled to Uganda with the International Citizen Service Entrepreneur programme (ICSE) to volunteer with Challenges Worldwide a charity that supports small to medium enterprises helping them to grow and have positive long lasting effects within the local community and economy. My time there was spent working within a small business called LANIC Enterprises Ltd: Paper Factory, who make handmade organic paper using banana fibres! The business was just starting up and needed support in many areas, me and my Ugandan counterparts successfully helped the business in these areas with great results. We also got given chances to support other parts of local communities as well, for example a group of us went to visit a children's home one weekend, another weekend some of us stewarded at the Ugandan International Marathon. Volunteering overseas has many subtle comparisons and obvious differences than volunteering with FODI. Working with FODI definitely helped me be a better volunteer in Uganda, from working week to week in Sunderland with people from different cultures and coming across different language barriers weekly this experience helped me greatly during my time in Uganda.

