



FRIENDS OF THE DROP-IN Newsletter



ISSUE NUMBER FIVE | MARCH 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 :

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magician, who made the most amazing balloon creations we have ever seen. The kids – and a lot of the adults – loved these and took them home at the end of the evening.

Our thanks go to the Quakers, who supported us in giving this party, the knitting group who sent us a cornucopia of knitted goods, Brar and Co. who helped with money towards the food, the very kind lady from St. Chad's who wishes to remain anonymous, but whose generosity is recognised with thanks, and to all the volunteers and helpers who made the day.

For the asylum seekers and refugees who enjoyed this day, we remember that for them it is a day with a difference : they know that people out there in the community think enough of them to give some Christmas cheer into lives that are sometimes lonely and bleak.

Thank you, all who helped.

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Thanks to Funders and Partners

FODI CHRISTMAS PARTY

Christmas seems like a long time ago, but actually it's only a few weeks! We in FODI celebrated in our usual way – a Christmas meal, presents for adults and children, and entertainment. (Though whether some of us absent-mindedly singing carols – not always in tune, and not always knowing the words - while we tidied up could be classed as entertainment is debatable.)

Santa Claus and his trusty elf helper visited us and distributed the presents; and we had a children's entertainer and



SANTA BY THE SEA

A group of intrepid parents and children braved the wind and cold to visit Santa at the Pods at Roker. It was really nice that Santa had his traditional forest-green outfit on (not the Coca Cola red version) and this led to an interesting discussion on the origins of the idea. Santa was helped by elves (we're not at all sure that the red on their noses was painted on!)

The children did seasonal colouring in, made Christmas cards, did a treasure trail, and received a gift from Santa. They didn't seem to feel the cold as much as we did, some of them venturing onto the beach to throw pebbles into the sea, which responded by showering them with water. Thanks to Susan Nolan and volunteers from the environmental charity CEED, based at Roker Park for providing this treat.



Sunderland City College Black History Week Event at Bede College 5th November 2014



Several organisations who work in partnership with the college were invited to the event. Kojoe and Felicity represented FODI were given a framed poster designed by students.

The video about asylum seekers lives in Sunderland, which had been made by FODI members and college students, led by Keith Lawler, was shown, introduced by Kojoe. It has now been posted on the college's intranet, Moodle.

Sunderland City College Equality & Diversity Week

We were invited to have a stall and several of our members were able to attend each of the campuses. This year a quiz had been given to students which helped them to overcome their shyness and ask questions.



Sunderland City College organised Sunderland World Party on 25th October at the Museum and Winter Gardens

FODI drummers had been invited to perform and received appreciative comments from the public, as they have at other community events which they have attended.



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 (next one planned is to Beamish – and I will try not to keep saying “We had one of those when I was young”); 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.

VOLUNTEERING COFFEE MORNING

FODI is an organisation that cannot function without its many helpers, volunteers, and supporters.

In the hectic few hours that represent a typical drop-in day, we sometimes don't have time to say more than a quick “Hello, how are you?” to each other, before getting stuck in to preparing food, answering queries, dishing out food, clothing, etc. So, we decided to have a coffee morning, just to have time together to relax, chat and share news.

So, eating food prepared for us by a few on the committee, instead of serving others, we chatted, put the world right (alas, it got muddled again when we went home) and just spent time with each other.

Here are a couple of photos showing us talking together, without the pressure of every day stuff at the Drop-in.



From Everywhere to Sunderland.....

We are often asked “Where do people being sent to Sunderland come from?” It's generally from places where there is current conflict, so it's no great surprise that most – but not all – of the people coming into Sunderland over the past few months are from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, Libya, Sudan.....the list seems almost endless.

So, imagine what it's like to escape the killing that is going in the Middle East and Africa at this time, and arrive in Sunderland. The first thing people talk about is, unsurprisingly, the weather. December and January in Sunderland are a far cry from the heat people come from. They arrive with just what they stand up in, usually clothing for the heat..... We are very grateful to Streetcare, and to the United Reformed Church, for donations to help with this, as well as all the people who donate warm clothing for the young men who make it here to safety.

The next thing they tell us about is how they like the quiet here. Those near the sea say it's very soothing to walk along the beach, and look at the sea. (We warn them not to go bathing – they are not used to our very cold North Sea!). Not even the Bermuda Triangle in the middle of the city upsets them – there is not the hustle and bustle of London, and no shooting.....They tell us that people here have time to say hello and try to help them.

And, of course, they are often a little bemused by our accent. People who have learned English in Tripoli or Khartoum or anywhere they are still taught that Received Pronunciation is “correct” English and are used to saying “ahp” have to try to guess that our blunt Northern “up” is the same word. Never mind – they soon learn, and, in the English conversation classes run by Jim at the Library, the accents soon flatten!

When they get “their papers” i.e. permission to stay and work here, a significant number want to stay here – we think that's quite a compliment to our City and the people of Sunderland. Though, as for everyone else, it's often difficult to find work in the kind of jobs they have come from....doctors, architects, engineers, IT specialists, journalists, artists : these are just some of the work people were doing before they had to flee their country. But they want to try.

Access to sport- Partnership with the Aquatic Centre

FODI continues to work with the Aquatic Centre to provide Lifecards for our members. FODI now has its own Gym and Swim vouchers printed by the Aquatic Centre, which are distributed to FODI members who are regular users of the gym and pool. The sports and leisure advisor of the Aquatic Centre, Elizabeth Meek has been very helpful when enrolling our large groups and has attended the drop in on several occasions with her twin sister Rainer to do the paperwork. 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.



FODI Day Trip to Northumberland

26 adults and children went by coach from Sunderland to Northumberland with Jim and Jane to Woodhorn Mining Museum, the best surviving example of a late 19th/early 20th century mine in the North East tradition. We enjoyed a windy ride on the little railway through the QEII Country Park to the north end of the lake, home to many birds and wildlife. The children had great fun doing messy play and visiting the dinosaur exhibition, while the adults visited various mining buildings, giving them an idea of the hard and dangerous life of the miners. Everyone visited the indoor museum, which had exhibitions of miners' equipment, banners and paintings. After lunch, we drove to Northumberlandia, an amazing outdoor artwork of a female form, which is 100 feet high and over 1/4 of a mile long. Although it was cold and windy, we climbed or pushed pushchairs to the top to see the breathtaking views of the coast and countryside. Adeola told me she had never seen anything like it in her life and found it amazing. We all piled back into the warmth of the coach and agreed we had a fabulous day out.



HOT FOOD AT THE DROP IN



During the winter months we have been serving hot food at the drop in every 2 weeks, prepared by FODI volunteers and members. We have cooked a variety of dishes, with Jim and Felicity making a nutritious and spicy Vegan dish, Dorothy her lovely lamb with rice and Jane a variety of Greek dishes. Two of our FODI members have proved to be talented cooks, with Reda making lamb curry and Ahmad a great chicken and yoghurt dish. All the dishes have been greatly appreciated by our FODI members, who are happy to try tasty food from different countries.

A COOKERY LESSON - FODI MEMBER REDA PASSES ON HIS COOKING SKILLS

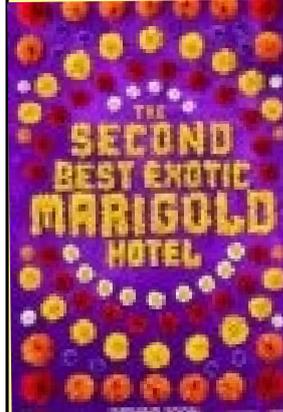


Two weeks ago we have been visited by Reda in our house at the Royalty to show us how to cook lentils with his ingredients he brought with him like cumin and other stuff. He made it so delicious. We were 3 persons including me and we really enjoyed his cooking. It takes short time to cook it. We were glad he showed us how to do it and he promised us he will come back next week with other recipe to cook. We thank Jane for organising the cooking session.

Written by Minasie from Eritrea

CINEMA VOUCHERS

Last year we decided to trial the use of cinema vouchers to give people access to the cinema now and again. This has proved very popular and here is a film review written by Mahmood from Iraq:



Last movie I attended was second Exotic Marigold Hotel. This film tells a wonderful story about an enthusiastic Indian guy who would get funding and high rating for his simple hotel. People from United States and Europe find this hotel a good place to live in different continent and to meet other people their age. The film was a mixture of comedy, romance and challenges. The language was very clear as the actors were very well known globally such as Judi Dench, Maggie Smith, Bill Nighy and Richard Gere. Attending cinema periodically is very entertaining and refreshing to our mind. Not only for this entertaining reasons but also it helps us to improve listening skills in English language.

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.

