



FRIENDS OF THE DROP-IN Newsletter



ISSUE NUMBER EIGHT | MARCH 2016



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.

F.O.D.I. achieved charitable status in 2013 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 :

fodi.sunderland@outlook.com

Facebook page is:

Friends of the Drop In - Sunderland

We now have a website at:

<http://fodisunderland.org>

committed to their support, and are delighted that people are beginning to “come in from the cold” – literally as well as metaphorically – to have somewhere secure to give them respite from destitution.

Many thanks to Action Housing for this, and to our own volunteers who oversee the support.

Amnesty International Day



On Sunday, 6th December, we again participated in the Amnesty International Day at Sunderland Minster.

Two of our asylum-seeking members spoke eloquently about the situation in their country and why they had to come here seeking safety; and of their hopes for the future of themselves and their families.

We learned from other speakers about what is happening in Palestine, what Save the Children are doing, and what Action Learning is hoping to do by moving into Sunderland, and our members found it good to know that there are people striving to make life better in countries where there is oppression.

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Semir's Award
Thanks to Funders and Partners

Action Foundation

We are pleased to be able to report that our working relationship with Action Housing has resulted in the opening of accommodation for destitute asylum seekers in Washington. Two have so far moved in, and have found a very kind welcome from the people in the church next to the accommodation. The initial two people (more are being interviewed to join them) are very happy with the accommodation, which they tell us excellent, very quiet, very comfortable, and gives them some peace. FODI has

BICYCLE PROJECT- 8 BIKES DISTRIBUTED AT THE DROP- IN 17/2/16

In order to help FODI members get around Sunderland cheaply, FODI has in the past, distributed donated bikes to people on the bike waiting list. Due to overwhelming demand for bikes, FODI volunteer Jim suggested we run a scheme where we buy second hand bikes to give to people for a refundable deposit to cover the cost of bike locks etc. The FODI committee agreed to this scheme and allocated a small sum of money to it. Jane and Jim sourced several bikes, which Jim checked over and gave out at the Drop- In yesterday to the first eight people on the waiting list, FODI member Habtom is delighted with his bike, as the photo shows. We still have 46 people on the waiting list !! Donations of bikes in reasonable condition are always welcome. See the contact page if you have a bike to donate.



Habtom and Jim with one of the bikes

FODI VOLUNTEER AHMED QUALIFIES AS A HEALTH CHAMPION – 16/2/16



In order to help improve asylum seeker and refugee health, FODI has had since last year a health coordinator, Val Blackett and Ahmed Salah who is working on the ground within the asylum seeker and refugee community. They are both FODI volunteers and have been working with Healthwatch and the Sunderland 'Live Life Well' team. Ahmed completed all of the five core modules for the Health Champion training. He also sat the accredited level 2 exam 'Understanding Health Improvement', which he passed with flying colours.

Ahmed is available at the Drop- In to help people with their health issues. Val, who is also a FODI volunteer, provides a regular Health update to the FODI committee, so we are aware of topics/issues being discussed at the meetings and we are very grateful for the work she is doing.

Congratulations Ahmed from everyone at FODI on your fantastic achievements. We are really proud to have you as the first FODI Health Champion and know you will be able to make a difference in the asylum seeker and refugee community.

FODI WOMENS' SEWING GROUP WITH THEIR NEW SEWING MACHINES- 8/2/16

Dorothy Ismail, our treasurer, recently applied to the Northumbria Police Charities Fund for a donation of 3 sewing machines and an overlocker to be used by the FODI Womens' Sewing group. The machines are now set up in the office and the women and their tutor Bernadette are delighted with them. They have made bags, aprons and cushion covers and are looking forward to their next project. The group provides friendship, a chance to put the world to rights over coffee and cake and the opportunity to learn new sewing skills. FODI is very grateful to Northumbria police officers Paul Marshall, CEO Sunderland and Paul Andre, Police Charities Fund.



Refreshments are provided so the women can chat over coffee and cake.



SUNDERLAND COLLEGE BARBERING STUDENTS VISIT THE DROP- IN 27/1/16

FODI members enjoyed free haircuts on Wednesday from Mark Sowerby's excellent barbering team. Every year the team visits the Drop- In regularly to practice its skills on our members. Before they come, Dorothy Ismail, our Treasurer, visits the barbering students at Hylton College to talk to them about asylum seekers and refugees. The talk is designed to help dispel some of the myths about seeking asylum and give the students an understanding of the people coming to the Drop- In. This year Dorothy was also accompanied by Yousef and Ammar, two asylum seekers from Syria, who spoke to the students about the terrible conflict in their home country. The photo below shows Yousef having his hair cut. FODI sends thanks and best wishes to Mark and the team and we look forward to the next visit.



FODI MEMBERS GIVE A PRESENTATION AT SUNDERLAND UNIVERSITY 1/2/16

On 1st February an event "Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Experiences and Policy Options" took place at Sunderland University, organised by Dr Peter Hayes. FODI members Salah, Ahmed and Abraham, with our friend Sara from Newcastle, took part in it.

They gave a compelling dramatic presentation "Let go, feel human" which had been written by them together with Maggie. This explained asylum seekers' reasons for coming and some of their experiences when they arrive here. Next was a question and answer session with the students, who had found the presentation both moving and informative.



FODI presentation

After this, Abraham and Sara showed slides of the "People like us" photos and text. They and others had prepared these with a professional photographer and writer. The project was organised by the charity Crossings. They are on display at the Discovery Museum, Newcastle until 12th February.

The students were very interested in all of these sessions and discussions continued over coffee and lunch.

In the evening session Dorothy joined local politicians to answer questions about "Policy Options for Refugees and Asylum Seekers".



Dorothy discussing policy options with local politicians

FODI BOWLING TRIP

On December 30th, FODI volunteers Jim and Jane took a group of FODI members bowling in Sunderland. A great time was had by all and some of those new to bowling discovered they had a hidden talent for it. Another trip will be arranged in 2016.



ACCESS TO SPORT- PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SUNDERLAND AQUATIC CENTRE



FODI continues to work with the Sunderland Aquatic Centre and Everyone Active to provide FODI Gym and Swim vouchers to our members. We are really grateful to Everyone Active staff Elizabeth Meek and Anthony who visited the Drop-In on March 2nd, to bring the eagerly awaited new batch of vouchers and also to help register new arrivals for Everyone Active cards.

We 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. Our members really appreciate being able to use the gym and swim and here is a short article written by Ammar and Yousef from Syria:

"When we have a lot of free time and we don't know where we can spend it, it's fantastic to fill it in benefits things.

The FODI group help asylum seekers and refugees by securing vouchers for the swimming and gym, and we get vouchers every week to enter to the swimming pool or gym in Sunderland Aquatic Centre.

Aquatic Centre is fabulous place to doing sports, it's very tidy and has a lot of new equipment in gym and the swimming pool is very clean and quiet.

Training in the gym is the effective way to keep your body fit and healthy and swimming helps to relax, so each time we use these vouchers we get more active and cheerful.

It's very kind from FODI to Help us to overcome our boring periods."

FODI CHRISTMAS PARTY

The annual FODI Christmas party was held at Saint Mary's on December 16th and was attended by about 190 adults and children. Flash the balloon man did magic tricks and made fantastic balloon creations which delighted everyone. A tasty meal of curry, rice and onion bhajis was served by FODI volunteers to everyone attending. Santa Claus gave presents and a selection box to all the children and toiletry gift sets were given to the adults. The party went off smoothly due to the excellent planning of FODI volunteer Felicity and her team and everyone said they enjoyed it. Thanks to our funders and all the people who gave donations to help with the party.



CINEMA

On 23/2/16, FODI volunteer Jane met 8 FODI members at the Empire Cinema in Sunderland, where they watched a film of their choice. Here is a review in his own words by FODI member Yousef, from Syria :

" It's very interesting to do something you enjoy, last week I got an invitation from Jane to watch a movie in Empire Cinema. I was very happy because I like cinema. I went to the cinema with my friends and we met Jane there. she asked us to choose any movie we want. We chose *The Finest Hour*, after that we bought some crisps, popcorn and drinks, then we went to the screen ten. As soon as we took our seats the movie started. It was really cool dim lights, high sound and big screen. I felt like I was an actor in the movie. The film is taking about a coast guard makes a daring rescue attempt off the coast of Cape Cod after a pair of oil tankers are destroyed during a blizzard in 1915. The best thing in this movie that it is a real story.

Last, I would like to thank FODI group for supporting asylum seekers and refugees by filing their time in useful things like this event."

FODI TRIP TO KESWICK

On a beautiful sunny day in August last year, FODI volunteers Jim, Jane and Salah took a group of 30 asylum seekers and refugees by coach to the picturesque market town of Keswick in Cumbria. It was the first time that any FODI members had visited this part of England. After a 2 hour journey through lovely countryside, we arrived in Keswick and headed to the park where we ate our lunch on the grass and in the welcome shade of the trees.

We then set off on a walk around Derwentwater, which has the magnificent Borrowdale Fells as a backdrop. The water was very inviting and several people went paddling in the lake to cool down. We then headed back to have a refreshing ice cream before leaving to return to Sunderland. Everyone said they had had a wonderful day and would love to come back on holiday to explore this beautiful area of England.



HALF TERM TRIP TO SEVEN STORIES IN NEWCASTLE 19/2/16

On Friday the 19th of February, 12 enthusiastic children aged 2 to 10 accompanied by their mums and FODI volunteers, Jane and Zeinab, enjoyed a great day at Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle.

The centre is housed over seven floors, each floor is dedicated to the celebration of children's books, bringing books and story-telling to life through exhibitions, lively events and play and where children are encouraged to explore books and storytelling and engage their imagination.

At the start, the children immersed themselves in a spell of reading and exploring books in the Story Station whilst the younger ones discovered toys and the creativity of play.

As the theme for the week was "A Week of Wizarding Wonder", the children were whisked off to create their own wands and Harry Potter glasses. After a well-earned packed lunch, we all made our way to the Rhyme Around the World exhibition where the children could discover the magic of song and rhyme and dress up as various characters.

As we hunted for the "Golden Snitch" around the centre, we came across the wonderful Harry Potter illustrations with a sprinkling of "Floo Powder" from the original artist Jim Kay and a few spiders to scare the adults.

At 2pm, the sorceress read a fantastic book "What's in the Witch's Kitchen" in the learning space. With fun actions and rhymes all the children participated in the interactive story, including 3 year old Momadou who can't speak any English.

The grand finale was a trip to Diagon Alley a busy street bustling with witches and wizards hurrying in and out of shops. The children were treated to a lively show by the Northumbria University Drama students. 7 year old Tchui became a witch's assistant, Amina, Nakour and Amani also played their part in the lively funny show.

A great day was had by all and we returned tired but enriched by a wonderful experience. When asked by a staff member what she thought of the show, 5 year old Annette replied "magical".



Making glasses and wands



Omar with the wizard



RHYME AROUND THE WORLD



DRESSING UP AS WIZARDS AND WITCHES

Ravelry Knitters

Our Ravelry knitters continue to provide us with lots of warm knitted clothes for the cold winter months. I find myself walking round Sunderland, thinking "Oooh, there's one of our hats" or "that scarf looks familiar".

Many thanks to all those who knit for our clients – you are doing your part to make them welcome here!

SEMIR'S AWARD

The New Year brought much welcomed news to FODI from former member Semir, who moved to London in 2015 after getting his refugee status. He is working 20 hours as a Finance officer with YMCA England and is studying at evening class for an AAT Level 3 in accounting. In December he got a special recognition award from the YMCA East London. He was also joined by his wife in December and is very happy. He thanked FODI for our full support while he was in Sunderland and wishes to show his wife Sunderland when the opportunity arises. Congratulations Semir to everyone from FODI and good luck with your studies.



YMCA award ceremony

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

