



FRIENDS OF THE DROP-IN

Newsletter



ISSUE NUMBER FOUR | OCTOBER 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 :

friendsofthedropin@yahoo.com

arrangements were made for the use of public transport on the way back. Despite the distance, it's a place where people who do not receive any support from the Government are still required to report, walking if necessary. That would be at least a twelve hour round trip on foot! Luckily, due to some generous donations, we manage to help those without access to any money to get there. The Reporting Centre is a daunting place for asylum seekers, and the walk was in solidarity with all those who have to face it regularly. Sponsorship for the drop-in and City of Sanctuary raised a good sum of money.

The weather was kind; we got sore-footed but not soaked, and we were able to distribute Asylum Mythbuster booklets to people along the way.

Christ Church in North Shields kindly welcomed us with food and refreshments - a very welcome and necessary relief from being on our feet.

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Refugee Week 2014

16th June 2014 - Walk For Sanctuary
Refugee Week began on Monday June 16th with a Walk for Sanctuary from Sunderland Minster to the Immigration Reporting Centre in North Shields. This is where asylum seekers have to report when so ordered, and it is a place that quickens the pulse, with its high security entry requirements, and always the fear of being detained there, without prior notification, and sent to Removal Centres. It's a walk of about six hours from here to there, so



June 17th, 12 till 3 pm Football Tournament

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. Ram, the enthusiastic manager of YAV, told us that YAV was the most diverse team in the competition.

Carrying on from this YAV arranged a football tournament for Refugee Week playing against other teams in the area.

18th June 2013 - Stories Of Sanctuary

Stories of Sanctuary was held on Wednesday, 18th June. Organised by Friends of the Drop-in and City of Sanctuary, it was an evening to celebrate Sunderland as a City of Sanctuary. Over a hundred and fifty people came to listen to people telling their experiences of why they need to seek asylum, and what has happened to them since they left their countries of birth. Some of these were subsequently broadcast on local radio, to a wider audience. There was music, dancing and a wide selection of food from many countries to taste and enjoy. Many of those attending told us how much they'd been interested in the personal testimonies of those seeking sanctuary here, and the food was equally well commented on.



African drumming performance and workshop at POP RECS Friday 20th June

On Friday, June 20th, FODI African Drummers and the drumming group from the Bunker held a joint drumming session at POP RECS, enjoyed by all those attending. This included some passersby, who couldn't resist the sound of the drums and came in to have a go; and many of the people waiting for the bus outside, who were tapping their feet and jigging about (a bit like the queue in the job centre in The Full Monty, though thankfully without the implications!). Some of the very young members of the audience joined in, shaking the maracas with great energy, if not quite in time with the rhythm. Some of the drumming rhythms were fairly easy to get started on, but then some of them became very intricate, and some of us couldn't work out at all how the drummers knew when to stop simultaneously.

Our Drummers have become very popular at events in the City, and are in great demand.



Refugee week music/poetry/dance event Sunday June 22nd, at Sunderland Minster.

Refugee Week in Sunderland ended with a music, dance and poetry event, organised by FODI. It was held at Sunderland Minster, bringing together different people from our communities. FODI singers and our African drumming group gave a rousing performance, as did the Sunderland University Dodici Voce choir. We played a short video, which explained the asylum process and showed a display of fantastic photos taken by one of our Iranian asylum seekers. One of the highlights of the event was a Street Dance crew, the Pallion Action Group, doing some impromptu dancing to the beats of our African drummers real fusion stuff!! We finished the event with some dance and play for the children.



Also, throughout the week there was displays at the City Library and The Minster for the purposes of providing information about asylum which we hope will raise awareness about this subject.

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.

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:



All Nations Singing Group

SINGING MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD

We have an All Nations Singing Group every Thursday from 1.30 to 3.00 at the FODI office 23 Bridge House, wonderfully led by Clare.

Here are some comments about it.!

The All Nations Singing Group is like a sanctuary to me and everyone who meets up for the sessions. Singing uplifts us, even the songs are stress relievers, especially when we have a lot of inner turmoil in our hearts. So singing them out and being around the melodious voices of people from different countries brings life and joy to us. Thank you for thinking of us and thanks to everyone here."

"The group is a lovely one. They are friendly and very warm, to get to know everybody. I find that they are just like me - wanting to meet new friends. Through singing it releases our stress and emotions, and we become a helping hand to one another."

"I've found the singing group to be very interesting. Singing is a passion for me and I have seen the session as an opportunity to offload the many hassles I've been faced with recently. It also brings together people of different nationalities and background but who are united in the act of singing." "Yes to come here. I really enjoy it. It is a really good lesson. And thank you."

"Simply make me happy. Whenever I feel like crying, I listening to music. It make me happy. I really love this singing group. It make my day. Each time I come for it I feel alive. It make my day. Please don't stop this group. It really help a lot, me especially. Thank you for bringing this singing group into practice. I love it and everyone. It take away my sorrow."

EVERYONE IS WELCOME If you are interested talk to Felicity or Jane, or just turn up on Thursday afternoon.



Sporting Activities

Football

Man of the Match of the Season!

Our favourite footballer (David Beckham – who he?) Mensah Kpoti, holding the trophy awarded to him for being voted the man of the match the most times during the season just finished. He won the award by a large majority, and it will join his other football trophies.

Mensah plays with a team fielded by Young Asian Voices, and also for a five-a-side team fielded by FODI.



Access to sport- Partnership with the Aquatic Centre

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

FODI volunteer Jane approached the Aquatic Centre and since September 2013 has worked with them to organise Lifecards and Gym passes for service users. We have provided gym access for many of our service users. 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 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. Those who have been using it said the exercise helps them forget some of their problems and they have made some new friends.

the IDAHOT (international day against homophobia and transphobia)

On Saturday 17th May Newcastle celebrated freedom of expression by exercising the right in UK law to hold a public event which included: Flying the Rainbow Flag at Newcastle Civic Centre; An introduction by event host Rev Elder Cecilia Eggleston (from MCC) who set the scene for the event; The FODI African Drummers who played at various points throughout the event – there was plenty of opportunities to have a bit of a dance for

those who wanted to. Guest Speakers who briefly talked about 'homophobia/transphobia in Africa', 'the persecution of Russian LGBT people', 'global transphobia', followed by one minutes noise to unite all in the global fight against homophobia and transphobia. People brought whistles and hooters to make noise! There was a ceremonial cake cutting and sharing of the special IDAHOT cake. The event took place at Newcastle Civic Centre's Ceremonial Way.

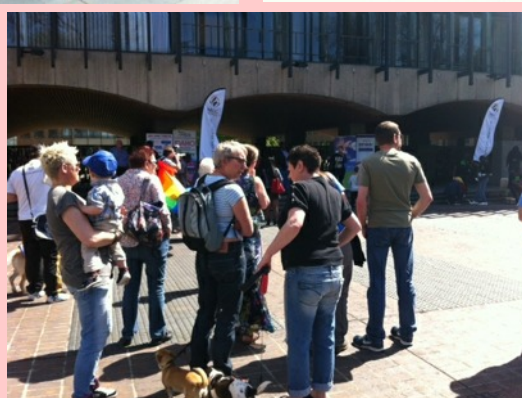
Comments from MESMAC North East Hate Crime worker Janet Owen

I just wanted to say that from my point of view the IDAHOT event on Saturday went really well – all of the guest speakers were fabulous – but extra credit goes to Abraham for being very engaging – he actually got down off the steps we were using as a stage and wandered around among the crowd speaking in to the microphone, and he did audience participation too – very good.

The FODI Drummers were absolutely fabulous – they were deliberately early as I'd mentioned to them that there might be traffic issues in town. They played their hearts out and people really enjoyed them – though only the guys who are part of my Rainbow Home group plus one other worker would get up to dance – everyone else was a bit over awed, but we'll try getting people up to join in the dancing another time as we'll definitely want to find other events we can book the FODI Drummers for.

Overall we had about 70 people there – really good numbers considering how many other events people had to choose from, plus the temptation of just heading out to the beach on such a hot sunny day.

Thanks so much for your help on this one Jane – I couldn't have managed without you!



ARBEIA visit 28th March 2014

First of all I would thank you FODI for arranging such a nice trip. It's phenomenal and I felt myself right back in the history where I can experience of roman soldiers busy in making for baking the breads while some are busy in training practice and the music of the clanging sounds of their swords are still echoing in the air of the site(ARBEIA). The museum, the paintings, the set up of the rooms, the luxurious life style of commander in chief and poor soldiers living in overcrowded rooms 8 people in one room all was remarkable. The Informatory remarks of Peter and others was very interesting. In short everything was well arranged everything was spell bounding and speech less. At the end, I don't forget to tell that how exotic English traditional food, Bowling, Tea, coke and juice in luxuries bar really made me and others for Day. Photos, walking around the beach and the hot coffee, ice cream, tea, cappuccino all was exceptional. Moreover the trip was for the most of the people the first time in UK and Europe all was happy and exited they need more like this trip I ask many who was in the trip with us they say was it is the first time trip in their life and all feel they're born again and all was with full hope to have like this trip again.

Semir Asli



TRIP TO YORK 22nd August

A group of asylum seekers and refugees went to York to have a look round the city. This was a bit further afield than we'd been before, and because it would involve a lot of walking round the town (not to mention marching up to the top of the hill and marching down again) we had decided we couldn't include children under the age of fourteen.

The bus was very comfortable, and it didn't take too long before we were dropped off near the city centre. We oooh'd and aaah'd at the Minster, the Shambles, the walls(which we tried to circumnavigate) lunched outside of Clifford's Tower (too expensive to get us all in) and then we went, via road train, to the National Rail Museum. On the way, we had encountered Vikings, Edwardians and the odd Roman (or were they students impersonating them all?)

The weather was very good to us – not a drop of the threatened rain. And photographs all the way – everyone wanted umpteen photos on their phones/cameras, and some of these are reproduced below. Nobody got lost despite the size of the city, and we all got home again with much discussion on the bus about the trip and York's history.



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.

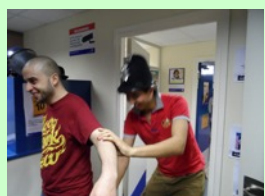
F.O.D.I. will need your contact information and that of any solicitor who is actively dealing with your case so that we can help in the event of a problem. There is an application form for this scheme and you will get help from a volunteer if you want to participate. All volunteers are covered by our 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.

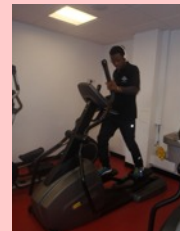
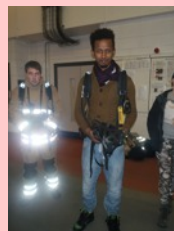
Safetyworks Trip

On April 11th, Jim and Jane took 11 FODI members to Safetyworks Interactive Safety Centre in Newcastle. We went by minibus, driven by David Goldsmith and provided by Tyne and Wear Fire Service. FODI members received training in Fire Safety in the Home, Basic First Aid, Safety on the Metro, and Personal Safety, which everyone found very useful. Afterwards, we went for lunch at the Crisis Skylight Community Cafe and then walked to the Quayside, where we saw the opening and closing of the amazing Millennium Bridge. After crossing over on the Bridge, we visited the incredible Sage Building, where we rested our weary feet, before heading home on the Metro. Most of the FODI members had never visited Newcastle, so this was interesting as well as educational.



Prince's Trust

Two young asylum seekers who attend the Wednesday Drop In sessions at St Mary's Church joined our Prince's Trust Team Programme in January and they have been exceptional throughout. Their attitude towards the paperwork, in spite of some language barriers, has been outstanding and the manner in which they mixed and bonded with the rest of the team was superb. Surafiel and Abubakar had never really spoken to any young people who were born in Sunderland and our other students had never spoken to any asylum seekers before. Luckily, first impressions were very positive for everyone. Any perceived prejudices were cast aside in the first few days with Abubakar's beaming smile and Surafiel's sense of humour helping them both mix well and integrate with the others. They have tackled all parts of the course with enthusiasm and supported their fellow Team members. The outdoor residential to Broomley Grange was exciting with everyone trying new activities such as the zip line, air rifle shooting, assault course and mid-ropes courses. These tested our nerves and team working skills. Respect for each other's backgrounds and beliefs was clear for all to see. The voluntary work to improve Doxford Park and Pavillion Care Home in Houghton-le-Spring could not have been completed without the immense effort put in by both Surafiel and Abubakar whose reliability, strength and initiative were key to our success. In the final weeks of the course Abubakar offered to give the whole Team a tour round his local mosque in Millfield and this was a fantastic afternoon. Fahim, a teacher at the mosque, and Abubakar showed us round explaining about Islam and what each part of the mosque was used for. Many of the students had never been inside a mosque and really enjoyed their time. The course ends on Thursday 17th April and the young men will leave with certificates signed by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, and they have truly earned this recognition for their efforts. They have been positive ambassadors for their individual communities and all the asylum seekers in Sunderland.



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 the 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 are working on a video with the students and staff at Hylton College, and one of its purposes is that we can 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. 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.

Women's Group

FODI's women's group began on 28th April 2014. They meet every Monday from 10am-12pm at the Sunderland City Library, in the Meeting Room. The group was created to provide a safe and comfortable environment for female refugees/asylum seekers and their children to socialise and have fun. For this reason enjoyable activities are organised each week including: arts and crafts, knitting, fitness classes, and team-building exercises. Over the summer we will be going on various day trips to places of local interest.



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.

