



Charitable Incorporated Organisation No. 1176524

Report from the Management Committee to the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Drop-In for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (FODI): 24th November 2021 (via Zoom)

Committee

Since the last AGM in November, we have welcomed Sally and Fanni to the committee as Trustees. We are reaping the benefits of Sally's experience in the voluntary sector, and Fanni's lived experience of the asylum system. Zara stood down as Secretary this year but continues to be a Trustee. We thank her for her contribution as Secretary. That position remains vacant at the time of writing. Tolosa also stepped down as a Trustee. We thank him for his contribution and wish him and his family well.

Sandra has now worked full time as FODI Manager for more than five years. The Trustees recognise that she puts in a significant amount of discretionary effort and hours above and beyond what may be expected of her role on paper. We are grateful for her dedication and commitment on behalf of our members. She has helped us to strengthen our links with partner organisations and to secure a range of funding bids. COVID-19 has not made her work any easier.

The committee is very grateful for the contribution made by our team of volunteers, as I hope will be evident in this report. We thank Ali, Amir, Susan, Marina, Sylvia, Neil, Abdullah, Pam, Barbara, Rahmet, Hermela, Ray, Nikki, Naila, Fiona, Gebrehanna, Ilyas, Hamad, Aimee, Sherwann, Luqman and Eduardo. We apologise to anyone whose name has been omitted from this list.

The Drop-In at St Mary's

It's difficult now to remember that the drop-in at St Mary's Catholic Centre was once our core activity. We look forward to it becoming so again.

We remained in regular contact with personnel at St Mary's over the past year and the possibility of restarting the drop-in at St Mary's Catholic Centre was discussed at Trustees' meetings. At the August meeting it was agreed to arrange a site visit as a first step. It was then agreed that we could reopen with a restriction on numbers attending and the first drop-in was on Wednesday, 22nd September.

So far the number of service users attending has been small, but growing.

We have been able to reopen only because of the fantastic support from our much-valued volunteers.

Some service providers have not returned to face to face meetings but representatives of Mears, ICOS, NERS, Action Language and police CEOs have attended on at least one occasion thus far.

Drop-Ins at Sunderland Minster

With the co-operation and support of Stuart and Angela Bain and other personnel connected to the Minster events have been held fortnightly, with a hiatus last winter when COVID-19 restrictions required the Minster to close.

Our service users have benefitted from our collaboration for the Minster events with Social Chef, who have provided fresh and other food items. We are very grateful to David, Malcolm, Laura and Paul from Social Chef.

At these events clothes, kitchenware, bedding and children's books and toys have also been available. When COVID-19 restrictions eased tea and coffee was provided and service users started to stay longer.

These Drop Ins have proved to be a hugely successful way of keeping in contact and supporting our clients. Numbers attending have averaged 50-60.

We wish Stuart and Angela well in their well-earned retirement and hope that our partnership with the Minster will remain strong.

Continuing COVID-19 Response

Vaccinations for service users were held at the Minster, one in March and the other in June. 98 people attended the first session and 75 the second: the drop in numbers is partly accounted for by the fact that by June more people were being vaccinated at GP surgeries.

Zara Juma was appointed as COVID Champions coordinator for FODI on a six month contract and began work in April. FODI was part of the targeted COVID provision as one of the partners of SBME network funded by Sunderland City Council to share key messages and encourage take up of the vaccine.

She received in house training and met up with other counterparts from the other organisations. Every individual had to be tracked who was reached through the project (by worker or volunteer). The anonymous total statistics were then shared monthly with SBMEN and collated to send to SCC for the city and national statistics. COVID Champion volunteers under the direction of Zara did doorstep outreach as well as attending FODI drop ins and other outreach events and provided their invaluable interpreting and translation skills.

We thank the COVID Champion volunteers: Barham, Doris, Saeid, Pam, Mohamed Alderi and Fanni.

Welcome and Orientation

COVID- 19 restrictions have made it impossible for us to maintain our previous offer, whereby all new arrivals were given their first welcome at the Drop In by volunteers with volunteer interpreters.

However, the "New Arrivals Pathway Agreement" with Mears which operated as a 6-month pilot from March to September facilitated engagement with new arrivals. FODI was one of 3 VCS who took part in this 6-month pilot whereby Mears shares information about new arrivals with FODI. FODI agreed not to share information with other organisations without consent from the service users and only where we have a data sharing agreement in place

with that organisation. All consent forms completed by MEARS workers were sent password protected to FODI.

As a minimum we gave £10 ALDI voucher and £10 for a 'phone top up to each new arrival, a total of 69 adults plus dependants between April and September 2021.

A Volunteer Training and Induction Package

This is carried out by Sandra to familiarise volunteers with the FODI charitable objects, the background to working with asylum seekers and refugees, and FODI policies and procedures. Sandra welcomed more than 10 new volunteers during the last year from both the local and the asylum seeker community.

Women's Group

Tracey West, dance practitioner, continued to lead online Zoom dance, then face to face dance sessions at St Luke's Church until the Trinity Church reopened recently. Members of the FODI women's group have shared many positive comments and videos of their experiences and are very positive about meeting together again in their safe welcoming space at Trinity. We thank Tracey for her enthusiasm and creativity.

Partnerships

We continue to work closely with many other local organisations: Action Foundation, Fightback, NERS, Red Cross, Roker Life, Social Chef, CEED, ICOS (International Community of Sunderland) the local police, local health and mental health services, MESMAC, Sunderland BME network, colleagues in many local churches, City of Sanctuary, Young Asian Voices, Sangini, Tyne and Wear Fire services and others.

ESOL

We maintain a partnership with Action Language. Throughout the past year we have advertised Action Language Zoom classes at our Minster events and we have seen some of our clients participating. Since the St Mary's drop in reopened Sue from Action Language has attended weekly with a view to enrolling new learners. We also work with Sunderland College to assist with registration for those in the country for 6+ months.

Gym, Swimming and Soft Play Activities for children

For much of the past year leisure facilities in Sunderland were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. As soon as they reopened we resumed giving out vouchers to service users, who have been happy to take advantage of the opportunity to keep fit both physically and mentally by visiting the facilities. £4000 for gym and swimming vouchers came from Barrow Cadbury Trust in conjunction with National Lottery.

Sports - funded by Barrow Cadbury Trust Covid Recovery fund

Through a successful joint bid with Young Asian Voices (YAV), we continued women's dance online and in person depending on COVID-19 restrictions, whilst YAV provided a comprehensive range of multi sports for adults and families– football, badminton, table tennis etc. COVID-19 rules required some changes to what sports could be offered.

Funding from the Barrow Cadbury Trust also enabled 5 a side sessions on Saturdays at GOALS and at YAV's Sans Street Centre.

Sunderland AFC

SAFC have resumed their generous offer of 10 tickets to every home League game since crowds were allowed back to stadia for the 2021-2022 season. One development this season has been that more women and girls have attended.

Community Project: Roker Life

FODI continued to work with Roker Life based at Roker URC: a project that aims to bring the Roker community into contact with asylum seekers in Sunderland through children's holiday activities, gardening projects and Social Chef.

Bike project

We were very grateful for an extension to the use of the grant from Quakers of Britain to enable us to repair and do safety checks on donated bikes and give out locks and lights to adults and helmets for children. Our valued volunteer this year, Agegnehu, has continued to service bikes during the period but we are now seeking a new volunteer to take on the role.

Unfortunately Sunderland Quakers sold their property with the shed in their grounds. We are grateful to staff at Roker URC who allowed us to store bikes in their church hall after we lost the use of the shed. All have now been moved to the FODI office as a stopgap measure.

FODI has given out 27 bikes in this period (a reduction from 52 last year) and has carried out repairs on previously donated bikes or those belonging to or given to asylum seekers in their communities. These have all made a significant difference to those receiving them, not only in improving their access around the city given their extremely low income and the prohibitive cost of transport, but also their physical fitness and mental well-being.

All these bikes were donated by Recyke y'bike in Newcastle or individuals in Sunderland. We have a good working partnership with Recyke y'bike who also offered reduced cost training for Agegnehu to complete his gold level Velotech course. This certificate will assist him in searching for a job now that he has his refugee status.

Christmas arrangements 2020

Activity packs for children and adults were delivered. Social Chef made up 30 family hampers of different sizes and 6 for single women's houses and similarly 6 for men's houses.

Feeding families also provided 20 additional family hampers.

100 £5 Bridges gift cards for children were also distributed, partly funded by Seaburn Rotary Club

Other support in winter 2020-2021 and beyond

Social Chef and Roker Life worked with FODI to help deliver additional support to our clients. We delivered 69 bags of food and toiletries to single men in February all made up by Social Chef and funded by Roker Life, Social Chef and FODI.

MBC is the ceramics and art project that we have worked with over a number of years with the women's group. They had funding for emergency help and gave us 20 bags of basic food and 20 bags of winter packs made up of hat, gloves, blankets etc. We were able to use these also for new arrivals as immediate help.

The Vegetarian Society offered us food boxes to make 2 vegetarian meals for 4 people each. The first delivery was of 77 boxes, the second was of 96.

BSBT inkind support

This covered 2 areas:

1: interviews with service users to be used in local schools.

A team from MC Saatchi came to Sunderland in January to conduct video interviews with 2 service users and interviewed a third in London soon after. The plan was to have three recordings, one for secondary school pupils, a simplified version for primary school pupils and one master copy (full-length unedited interviews).

However, after a long delay the Home Office advised us that the films would not be released to us.

2: branding

Following a meeting with Sandra and 2 Trustees Kamahl and Matt from MCSaatchi worked on new branding to be used in future on all of our letter heads, flyers and future website development. The outcome may be seen at the head of this report.

Refugee Week

FODI took a supporting role this year. Some of our service users took part in the Walk of Sanctuary- socially distanced but as enjoyable as ever. We also supported a Zoom discussion hosted by Chris Howson focusing on how to make Sunderland as welcoming a city as possible

Interpreting

FODI uses a number of our volunteers as interpreters who use their language skills to help others. As you can see from this report, this is vital to many of our members. If you may be able to help with interpreting, please talk to Sandra.

Move On

Several of our volunteers work tirelessly to assist those who have gained status to go through the difficult transition process and settle here in Sunderland or move on to other cities where they go to join relatives, friends or to look for work.

We refer clients who have been given leave to remain to the ICOS Wise Steps work programme to assist them into future work and training.

Justice Together Initiative

FODI was part of North of England Law Centre planning for their bid to provide a fairer and more extensive reach for immigration services throughout the NE. FODI has an established working relationship with NE Law Centre. The successful bid offers an extended outreach with FODI for the next two years to provide immigration advice through referral to NE Law Centre in particular for those who cannot access legal aid.

Baby bank and FISCUS at the Co-op Centre.

After initial conversations with Anita Saddington, CEO of FISCUS, it was agreed that FODI would give all baby equipment and clothes to their baby bank and we would refer all our clients there for support. Anita was very keen to develop a partnership with FODI and support our clients.

Destitute Clients in the Washington House

FODI continued to give financial support to 4 destitute clients who live in the Washington house which is maintained through Action Foundation.

Sunderland University Medical Students

FODI was assigned six second year medical students on community placement. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 much of the training offered was online but the students were given opportunities to join the Drop-In and meet some of our service users. Feedback was positive, despite the limited access.

PhD study

During 2021 we hosted a PhD student who conducted ethnographic research on FODI's work with asylum seekers and refugees. This forms the basis of a study on leadership practice at asylum seeker and refugee charities.

Heritage project organized by Sunderland City Council (SCC)

This involved two bus trips to local places of cultural and historic interest. 15 service users attended the first trip in July and 21 the second in August.

Citizen Songwriters and SCC facilitated these trips.

Seascapes Blue Wave dance project

FODI women dancers joined with women from Sangini to take part in a ten week dance project to develop a site specific performance with dance artist Constance Humphries and supported by staff from the National Trust. The work took inspiration from experiencing sound and movement of the sea and was commissioned by Seascapes Co/lab at the University of Sunderland. This experience had a significant impact on the well-being and sense of belonging of all participants

Secret Garden

Our team of dedicated gardening volunteers has been working each week at the Secret Garden where there is a very large project underway to be completed over at least two years. David Banks who is chair of the Northern Allotments society as well as manager of the whole Secret Garden project, is always impressed with how much our volunteers achieve.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish to express our very sincere thanks to all the individuals and organisations who have helped us this last year, whether as volunteers, attendees at the Drop-In, or donors of gifts or money, especially our main funders. We have been supported for the year under review by the NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Sunderland Partnership, Sunderland City Council, Community Foundation Tyne and Wear Roseline Fund and Pea Green Boat Fund, National Emergency Trust Covid 19 fund, Barrow Cadbury Trust Covid 19 Support fund, Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria Coronavirus Response Fund, Sunderland City Council (Covid Winter Fund), Mears Foundation, as well as most welcome donations from a range of organisations including the St Vincent de Paul Society, Brar & Co, Seaburn Rotary Club and other organisations and individuals who prefer not to be named. Without these funders FODI would not exist.

Challenges

- Meeting the needs of all our clients in uncertain times, with COVID-19 infection rates still high.
- Ensuring that from now on we are able to resume our previous level of service
- Implementing a strategic plan to ensure the development of FODI following the recent strategy meeting
- Continuing to work in partnership with other voluntary groups.

- Responding to changing circumstances for clients after lockdown eg people with status being required to leave asylum seeker accommodation and needing local housing while refused clients now being made homeless needing referrals to limited housing for the destitute provided by Action Foundation in Newcastle
- Dealing with difficulties likely to arise when the Nationality and Borders Bill is passed into law.
- Appointing a new Treasurer.

FODI Committee members 2021

Zeinab Cummings, Abraham Eiluorior, Zara Juma, Felicity Livsey, Fanni Ng'ambi, Stephen Newman, Jane Nikolarakis, Mali Saha, Sally Vivyan