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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): 18th October 2023**

**Committee**

Since the last AGM (via Zoom) in November 2022, we have welcomed Pauline to the committee as a Trustee. Felicity has stood down as Treasurer and as a Trustee and has been replaced as Treasurer by Sally. Zeinab also stood down as a Trustee. The Trustees are grateful to Felicity and Zeinab for their long-term commitment and contribution to FODI.

The committee is a well-knit group of committed individuals from a wide range of backgrounds including people with lived experience of the asylum system. We did not know each other prior to our involvement with FODI but all value the culture of mutual respect within the charity. Committee meetings are conducted via Zoom

**Manager and Operations Assistant.**

Sandra has now worked full time as FODI Manager for more than seven years. She intends to retire in November this year and will step down from the role imminently. The Trustees recognise the experience and capability that she has brought to the role, and that she has always put 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 to our members over the past seven years. She has helped us to strengthen our links with partner organisations and to secure a range of funding bids. This has been a very difficult year for her and the Trustees have huge admiration for the way in which she has maintained her dedication to the role.

Fanni has continued in the role of Operations Assistant to which she was appointed in April 2022. Her lived experience of the asylum system, her dedication and her professional skills add value to FODI. For two months in Summer 2023 she was the de facto Manager and maintained FODI’s operation in a highly effective manner. In view of this and in recognition of her many skills and abilities the Trustees decided to appoint her to the role of Manager. The process of recruiting an Operations Assistant is in progress.

**Finance Officer**

Maria was appointed to this position on a part-time basis early in 2023 and has proved to be a highly competent and valuable member of the FODI team.

**Volunteers.**

The committee is very grateful for the contribution made by our team of volunteers, without whom it would be impossible to maintain all our services, especially the drop-ins at the Minster and St. Mary’s Our volunteers include both locals and service users who form a very committed team.

We thank (in no particular order): Aminullah, Rayan, Melika, Sylvia, Pam, , Naila, Fiona, Sergey, Adel, James, Beshir, Yassir, Snawber, Natalya, Hannah, Kwestan, Wafaa, Ludmila, Lyudmila, Maryam, Tatyana, Sarbast, Amirabbas, Mali, George, Moustapha, Hamad, Tom, Vernon and Andrew. We apologise to anyone whose name has been inadvertently omitted from this list.

**Funders**

We continue to enjoy the fruits of major bids to the National Lottery Community Fund and Tudor Trust. The former provides part of our core funding for five years, the latter for three. Both funders commended FODI for the service which it delivers. We were also grateful to Lloyds Bank Foundation for giving us another year of core funding making this the seventh year they have funded FODI. These funds provide stability to FODI and facilitate forward planning. Our other funders are listed at the end of the report.

**Strategic Plan**

 A strategic plan covering the period 2022-2025 was discussed and agreed by trustees and manager at a meeting in November 2021. The plan took account of a SWOT analysis of the charity and classified its operations into essential, desirable and aspirational. The plan was reviewed and updated at a meeting in December 2022. The principles of the planning process are as follows:

* FODI’s board takes a collective approach to planning and generally operates via consensus. This process has been inclusive, with all voices heard including that of the charity’s employed staff.
* FODI is a partnership between asylum seekers and refugees and longer-term residents of the region. FODI particularly values the expertise that people with lived experience of the UK immigration and asylum system bring to our planning and decision making. That lived experience has been brought to bear on the strategy.

**Drop-In at St Mary’s**

The weekly drop has seen a steady increase in numbers which is a reflection of the increase in asylum seekers in Sunderland. Attendance numbers are now over 100 per week. FODI service users come from over 40 countries and speak more than 25 different languages.

Our service providers have returned, with weekly attendance by NERS advice worker, SCC Resettlement workers and MEARS welfare workers. Police engagement officers and representatives of Health net, NERISE and TOP have also attended.

**Drop-In at Sunderland Minster**

With the co-operation and support of Heather and other personnel connected to the Minster events have been held fortnightly.

At these events fresh and packaged food are distributed to service users provided by funding from Sunderland Council strategic services.

Clothes, kitchenware, bedding and children’s books and toys have also been available. Tea, coffee, soft drinks and biscuits are served by our good friends Ellen and Emma.

These drop ins have proved to be a hugely successful way of keeping in contact and supporting our clients. Numbers attending have averaged 70-80 adults.

**Supermarket food vouchers**

These were distributed to all our service users during this year as part of the Local Authority’s Household Support Fund. This has been an essential support as our service users faced increased hardship due to the cost of living crisis. In addition, we have used other local authority funding for food and toiletries as well as emergency cash from the National Lottery and our individual donors for those who find themselves destitute.

**New arrivals**

FODI continues to be the FPOC, (First point of contact) for all new arrivals in Sunderland. We receive signed consent forms from MEARS accommodation providers and the Operations Assistant contacts each new person/family to invite them to the drop in to register and receive our welcome and orientation delivered by experienced volunteers. Each new arrival also receives a phone top up from our NEMP (North East Migration Partnership) funding and early access to donations at our collection days. There has been a steady increase in the number of asylum seekers in Sunderland with the figure at March 20

23 being over 650 which includes more than 75 families with about 150 children.

**Initial Accommodation Centre**

The initial intake of 60 single men to the hotel was dispersed in early 2023. Very few of them remained in Sunderland. A new intake replaced them. Sandra has maintained close contact with Mears staff at the hotel and most of the new intake have accessed FODI’s services. This number is now going to be doubled as the men have to share rooms and the number will be 120 from next month.

**FODI’s premises.**

Since we successfully relocated to our new office premises in the Fiscus Co-op building, SR2 8AH in May 2022 FODI has maintained an excellent relationship with Fiscus manager Anita and all Fiscus staff. The container for the storage and maintenance of bikes on the premises has facilitated the throughput of bikes (see below). In addition, we refer our service users to Fiscus’ Baby Bank, we have use of their storage areas for our fresh veg delivery for our drop ins and their volunteer supports us with the use of their van for transport of food.

**A Volunteer Training and Induction Package**

This is carried out by Sandra or Fannito familiarise volunteers with the FODI charitable objects, the background to working with asylum seekers and refugees, and FODI policies and procedures.

**Women’s Group**

The women’s group which meets on Fridays has remained at Trinity Church, Stockton Road over the past year. The women, teachers and volunteers have been able to lift their whole mood and well-being through movement and relaxation classes provided by dance artist Tracey West.

 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.

**Blue Wave 2**

This combined contemporary dance, art and costume making on the themes of flowers and the sea. The women were completely committed to this project as they were familiar with the setting and dance teacher Tracey West; Constance Humphries dance choreographer who had already worked with FODI and Sangini on Blue Wave 1 joined our Friday group. Lijie led the silk painting scarves for costume and Maggie Hsaio delivered the art sessions. This project was a collaboration with three other refugee/minorities groups in the region. An Arts Council England grant paid for the facilitators and materials whilst FODI contributed in-kind funding for the rent, bus fares and creche. The sharing performance in January was a very positive and moving experience for both participants and the audience. The group received huge praise. They also performed at the Tall Ships event in July in Hartlepool with the three other groups.

**Partnerships**

We continue to work closely with many other local organisations: Action Foundation, Fightback, NERS, Red Cross, Roker Life, Sunderland University COLAB Seascapes project, Sunderland Museum, Sunshine Coop, Citizen Songwriters, 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.

Other partnerships are cited below.

**Skimstone Arts Unity Festival project**

FODI worked with Claire and Peter from Skimstone Arts on some music, drama and film making sessions for the Unity Festival in March 23. The group was made up of single men who did several sessions at Pop Recs where a range of talents emerged including music making, spoken word and singing. The participants later joined their counterparts in Stockton on Tees and worked together for the Unity Festival film shown in March ·

**Coastal Cuisine Art Project combining food and ceramic making- funded by Seascapes Colab Sunderland University**

This researchproject lead by Dr Suzy O’Hara which started in September 22 continued until February 23. The families and single people were taught ceramics in November and made table ware with Mary Watson and this culminated in an international celebration meal in February 2023 cooked at Life Kitchen and eaten together at the museum. This was an excellent example of FODI collaboration with a local group. Videos can be seen on Colab Sunderland Instagram [CoLab Sunderland (@colabsunderlanduniversity) • Instagram photos and videos](https://www.instagram.com/p/CurzGEMBPoG/) and their website [SeaScapes: Coastal Cuisine — Co/Lab Sunderland (colabsunderland.uk)](https://colabsunderland.uk/seascapes-subprojects/coastal-cuisine). \*This was the first major project FODI had done on Saturdays and was such a success we have now committed to a number of Saturday activities.

**Sun Cultures**

This project in collaboration with Jennie Lambert at Sunderland Museum ran on Saturdays for families and single people. A large number of families and single people took part. The project came out of the Gathering Light exhibition on tour from the British Museum focusing on the find of a gold bulla from the Bronze age which represents the sun. A whole range of art, stories and crafts took place to celebrate and explore the theme of the sun in different cultures.

**Sunshine Corner project** ran for four sessions on Saturdays in May and June at Sunderland Museum for families. It combined drumming, movement and food from the local Sunshine Cooperative CIC. This was very well attened by over 40 members of FODI of all ages. The facilitators were very flexible and adapted to fit the needs of the group. Another very successful collaboration with FODI.

**Citizen Songwriters** – Songs of Sanctuary :-FODI members continued their involvement with local people to form a choir and perform and write songs together under the leadership of citizen songwriters. This culminated in a recording and an animation film of a song called ‘Bridge across the River’ especially written by the group about welcoming outsiders to Sunderland.

**Medical students**

6 medical students from the University of Sunderland were attached to and were given free time on Wednesday afternoon to attend the drop in. FODI was represented at a celebration event at the Fire Station at which all medical students presented displays showcasing their partnerships. The 6 attached to FODI expressed gratitude to us and high regard for the services which FODI offers.

**NE RISE**

This project funded by the government and based out of NERS took referrals from FODI for our move on service users. It aimed to help resettle those who had just received refugee status by assisting with housing, integration and routes to employment. It is made up of NERS for support and housing for new refugees, Jewish World relief for employment pathways and TOP – The Other Perspective - who assisted those who received their status in the last 18months. We hosted these workers at our drop ins. Referrals were not straightforward as many SUs went to VCS workers they already knew. In addition, there were some issues of expectation as NE RISE was limited in what it could do for housing which remains a major concern for new refugees and outweighs their employment needs. However, a number of our clients were able to get employment and training through this collaboration.

**Justice Together Initiative**

 As a partner in this project, FODI continued to refer family reunion cases, refused clients and those with no recourse to public funds to get immigration advice from the North East Law Centre. Lawyers respond as they are able and have provided FODI with funding to assist in the holistic support of these clients through our Drop-In and making our premises available if needed.

**Secret Garden**

This is a project partially funded by the National Lottery and managed by David Banks of Northern Allotment, Leisure and Community Gardens (NALCG) to help establish the clearance and development of this community garden in Ford Estate in Sunderland. FODI has a dedicated group of volunteers who have helped to transform this space through their weekly attendance with supervision from FODI operations assistant Fanni Ngambi. They have worked on both major building and clearance projects for the sheds, paths and raised beds and have established a dedicated place for FODI volunteers to grow food. A number of volunteers having extensive experience in this field. Those taking part have found this project significantly improves their overall mental well-being.

**KYN Know Your Neighbourhood ESOL project**

 FODI received funding for this project to run over 2 years, to include salary for a part-time project co-ordinator and room hire at the Co-op Centre.

The aims of the project are for our service users to have English classes and to get to know their local community. Luke was appointed to the post in July. Currently there are classes at different levels on three days each week. This project committed FODI to deliver ESOL classes for asylum seekers and refugees with additional skills development and/or well-being activities attached to each session. The project will also offer volunteering opportunities for clients and the wider community.

ESOL partnerships

We maintain a partnership with Action Language and the new project coordinator in Sunderland, Rim Day, and overall manager of ESOL at Action Language Joanne Norton. Action Language moved to a new location in September, Bethany City Church.

 We also work with Sunderland College to assist with registration for those in the country for 6+ months.

Michael from the University of Sunderland has also organized ESOL classes and we have helped him to recruit learners. We advertised ESOL classes for the purpose of CELTA training which ran for 4 weeks in summer 2023.

**Sports**

 FODI continued to provide a once-a-week Gym/Swim voucher for every client who registered for this project. We also provided soft play vouchers for children during the holidays. This project is vital to our service users who could not otherwise access these facilities and we are grateful to the continued use of CCG/ICB funding to offer this

**Sunderland AFC**

SAFC have maintained their generous offerof10 tickets to every home League game. These are as popular as ever. We are deeply grateful to SAFC and expressed our gratitude both by email and with a visit to the ticket office at the end of last season.

**Roker Life**

Once again Roker Life operated very successful summer fun days at their garden and hall. Those families in attendance loved their time there and spoke warmly of the people they met and the range of activities.

**Summer visit to Tweddle Farm**

This was another fantastic day out with all the families at the farm. A big thank you to the indefatigable Jane for organising again and to all staff and volunteers who did such a good job on the day**.**

**Bike project**

FODI has continued to work on donated bikes and give them out to adults and children desperate for a way of getting around the city.

FODI was very fortunate to receive funding from Temple et al Community Foundation Tyne and Wear to run our bike project for 12 months and cover the costs of tools, repair parts, training and safety equipment. We have successful set up a trade account for these purchases.

 We are supported extensively by Recyke y’bike in Byker, Newcastle, who give us donated bikes for repair and distribution and offer volunteering opportunities to train,.

FODI has given out 71 bikes in this period 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.

We thank Moustapha, George and our new volunteer Hamad for their invaluable contribution as volunteers repairing bikes.

**Christmas 2022**

The decision was made to not hold a large party but to have a meal for service users at the drop in and to give vouchers to the children again funded mostly by Seaburn Rotary Club. In addition, we were very generously supported by an organization called SAPS ( Sunderland Area Parent Support) who included us in their Christmas box appeal and gave us 166 Christmas Boxes which included pyjamas, toys and sweets for every child. These were the highlight of the season for many of our families who were generously assisted by all our volunteers with cars to deliver them. We were also supported for the third year running from Feeding Families who sent us 40 boxes of food.

Plans are in hand for Christmas 2023- watch this space!

**Christmas Tree Festival at Sunderland Minster**

 FODI took part in this inaugural Christmas tree festival at the Minster with a tree covered in orange hearts on the theme ‘Sunderland Welcomes Refugees’. This was an extension of a previous national campaign ‘Show Your Heart’ where people were invited to write messages of support and welcome to asylum seekers in the community. Statutory groups also contributed hearts including the police and local authority.

**Refugee Week 2023**

The theme this year was Compassion. The programme was co-ordinated by FODI but could only have been delivered with the support of partners. As usual Chris’ Walk of Sanctuary kicked off the week, with a cricket match organized by YAV to follow in the evening. Other events were a football tournament organized by Northumbria Police, “Breakfast with a refugee” at Back on the Map, a Refugee Week celebration in Mowbray Park organized by ICOS, a celebration organized by Sunderland BME Network, and a series of lunches: FODI on Wednesday, Fightback on Thursday and the Minster on Sunday

**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 or Fanni.

**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,( now ICB) SCC Sunderland City Council (SBMEN partners) - Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network Household Support Fund, Community Foundation Tyne and Wear T&W&N Temple Fund for the Bike project, Empower Community Fund Sunderland, NEMP North East Migration Partnership New Arrivals Support Project, Justice Together Initiative Roseline Foundation via the Community Foundation and Pea Green Boat Community First Foundation via the Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.

FODI also received most welcome donations from a range of organisations including the St Vincent de Paul Society, 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 during a continuing cost of living crisis.
* Responding to increased demand generated by a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in Sunderland.
* Continuing to implement the strategic plan to ensure the development of FODI.
* Responding to changing circumstances for clients eg people being placed further from the city centre
* Lack of immigration solicitors in Sunderland
* Those presented by government legislation

**FODI Committee members October 2023**

 Abraham Eiluorior, Zara Juma, Steve Newman, Jane Nikolarakis, Brenda Reardon, Sally Vivyan, Pauline Shannon