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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): 13th November 2024**

**Committee**

Since the last (in-person) AGM in October 2023 there have been several changes of personnel, although the total number of trustees remains the same (7- we can have up to 15). Sally stood down as a trustee and Treasurer in December 2023, Pauline stood down as a trustee and Secretary in March 2024 and Zara stood down as a trustee in April 2024. We thank all of them for their contributions to FODI.

We have been fortunate indeed to be able to appoint highly capable new trustees to fill the gaps. Mahnur became a trustee and Treasurer in January 2024, and Talha and Melika became trustees in October 2023.

The stalwarts from before the last AGM remain- Aby, Brenda, Jane and Steve,

The committee is a well-knit group of committed individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, and the appointments detailed above increase the proportion of trustees with lived experience of the asylum system. Notably, none of us knew each other before our involvement with FODI but all value the culture of mutual respect within the charity.

Since Pauline stepped down the post of Secretary has been vacant, with Jane stepping in to take minutes of meetings. We are keen to see this vacancy filled and we are always receptive to welcoming new blood to the committee.

Committee meetings are conducted via Zoom. In 2024 we have regularised the number of meetings to one every two months i.e. 6 per annum.

**Manager and Operations Assistant.**

Sandra retired as Manager in November 2023 after 7 years in the role. During her tenure FODI grew in stature and the prospect of her retirement was a daunting one. With her usual commitment and willingness to do more than could reasonably have been expected of her she devoted a lot of goodwill time to ensuring a smooth handover to Fanni and remains a valuable adviser.

As noted in last year’s report, for two months in Summer 2023 Fanni was the de facto Manager and maintained FODI’s operation in a highly effective manner. In view of this and of her performance before that as Operations Assistant the Trustees decided to appoint her to the role of Manager.

She took up the role in December 2023 and has ensured that FODI has maintained its respected position in the community.

An application and interview process was instigated for the role of Operations Assistant and the interview panel of trustees was pleased to appoint Farkhunda to the role in November 2023. Farkhunda’s ability to speak 5 languages is an outstanding asset but she has many other valuable qualities.

Fanni and Farkhunda work effectively as a team with a clear division of roles and responsibilities.

**Finance Officer**

Maria continues in this position on a part-time basis and is a highly competent and valued 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 together form a very committed team.

We thank (in no particular order): Rayan, Sylvia, Pam, Naila, Fiona, Serge, Bashir, Kwestan, Ludmilla, Tatyana, Sarbast, Mali, Vernon, Luna, Gill, Jacob, Booja, Reza, Natalya, Berhanye, Mary, Norouz, Ali, Zahra, Samira, Sedigheh, Kasra, Abdelhai, Ahmed, Marziyeh and a second Vernon (at the Co-op Centre). We apologise to anyone whose name has been inadvertently omitted from this list.

Coffee mornings are held periodically to thank volunteers for their contributions.

**Funders and Donors**

We have continued to enjoy the fruits of major bids to the National Lottery Community Fund, Tudor Trust and Sir James Knott Foundation. The first provides part of our core funding for five years and the second’s 3 year period is now ending. The funding from the Sir James Knott Foundation is in its first year of three. All these funders commended FODI for the service which it delivers. Recently funding over 2 years from Hilden Trust was secured.

We have also been supported for the year under review by the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network (SBMEN), Sunderland City Council Household Support Fund (HSF), Tyne and Wear T&W&N Temple for the Bike project, The Leather Sellers Foundation, Justice Together Initiative, Hadrian Trust., Community Foundation Tyne and Wear, NEMP North East Migration Partnership New Arrivals Support Project, Justice Together Initiative and the Roseline Foundation.

FODI also received most welcome donations from individuals who prefer not to be named.

Without all these funders FODI would not exist.

**Strategic Plan**

A strategic plan covering the period 2022-2025 was discussed and agreed by trustees and the manager at a meeting in November 2021. The plan was reviewed and updated at a meeting in December 2022 and again at a meeting in January 2024.

For each year within the period 2021-2025 new key steps for the year were identified and agreed.

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.

A new plan will be prepared by trustees with support from Lloyds Foundation (see below) and implemented in early 2025.

**Drop-In at St Mary’s**

The weekly drop-in has again seen an increase in numbers which is a reflection of the increase in asylum seekers in Sunderland and of how much service users value the drop-in. Attendance numbers are 100-150 per week. FODI service users come from over 40 countries and speak more than 25 different languages.

Service users may access support from NERS and Together for Children hub workers, as well as from Mears, Sunderland Health Watch, Reed in Partnership, and SCC Resettlement workers who attend at times. Staff from Young Asian Voices (YAV) also attend regularly to offer sport activities.

**Drop-In at Sunderland Minster**

With the cooperation and support of Heather and other personnel connected to the Minster events have continued to be held fortnightly.

At these events, fresh and packaged food, hygiene and care packages are distributed to service users provided by funding from the Sunderland City Council Household Support Fund in collaboration with Sunderland Black and Minority Ethnic Network (SBMEN) partners. The attendance for this drop-in per session is 80- 100 attendees.

Clothes, kitchenware, bedding and children’s books and toys have also been available. For these items we are very grateful to members of the local community, which come in such volume that service users know that there will be new things each time. Tea, coffee, soft drinks and biscuits are served with unfailing charm by our good friends Ellen and Emma.

These drop-ins have remained a hugely successful way of keeping in contact and supporting our clients. The numbers attending have averaged 80-100.

**New arrivals**

FODI continues to be the FPOC, (First point of contact) for all new arrivals in Sunderland. We receive signed consent forms from the 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. Until March 2024 each new arrival also received a phone top-up from our NEMP (North East Migration Partnership) funding and since the start of April that has changed to a SIM card from Good Things Foundation. New arrivals also have first access to donations at our collection days at the Minster.. There has been a steady increase in the number of asylum seekers in Sunderland., rising to 684 people as of March 2024, 75 of whom are families.

The Initial Accommodation Centre was closed in June 2024 and the residents dispersed, most out of Sunderland.

**FODI’s premises.**

We must acknowledge the excellent relationship we enjoy with Fiscus manager Anita and all Fiscus staff, who are always helpful and supportive. 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 Vernon supports us with the use of their van for the transport of food.

**A Volunteer Training and Induction Package**

This is carried out by Fannito familiarise volunteers with the FODI charitable objects, the background to working with asylum seekers and refugees, and FODI policies and procedures. During the past year, 25 volunteers have received the training.

**Women’s Group**

The women’s group meets at Trinity Church, Stockton Road on Fridays. 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 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: Sunderland City Council, Mears, Reed in Partnership, Action Foundation, Fightback, NERS, Red Cross, Roker Life, Sunderland Museum, Sunshine Cooperative, Citizen Songwriters, ICOS (International Community of Sunderland) the local police, local health and mental health services, Sunderland BME network, colleagues in many local churches, City of Sanctuary, Young Asian Voices, Sangini, Tyne and Wear Fire services and others.

A new scheme run by the National Trust has awarded FODI a community pass allowing groups of up to 30 people free entry to local NT sites.

Other partnerships are cited individually below.

**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 produced displays of high quality and expressed gratitude to us and high regard for the services which FODI offers.

**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. 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 have 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 recognises the paramount importance of language skills for people keen to integrate into the local community.

This project which includes salary for a part-time project coordinator and room hire at the Co-op Centre is in its second year.

The aims of the project are for our service users to have English classes and to get to know their local community. Luke remains in post, having been appointed in July 2023. 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. The project is also required to direct service users to volunteering opportunities in the wider community.

84 learners have registered for the project since October 2023 and average weekly attendance across all classes currently stands at 37.

The project has enabled learners to visit a range of local sites of cultural significance

(eg Sunderland Museum, The Donnison School, Durham Cathedral, Durham Oriental Museum, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts, The Glasshouse, The Laing Art Gallery and many more). There have also been a number of guided walks- River Wear, Durham Coastal Path, Penshaw Monument and more.

Outside providers have delivered sessions on oral health (NHS dental team), hate crime (Aly at Northumbria Police) and perhaps most importantly pizza making (Jo at My Sister’s Kitchen)

**ESOL partnerships**

We maintain a partnership with Action Language and the project coordinator in Sunderland, Rim Day, and the overall manager of ESOL at Action Language Joanne Norton. In Sunderland Action Language operates at Bethany City Church in Stockton Road**.**

We also work with Sunderland College to assist with registration for those in the country for 6+ months. We congratulate the college on being awarded College of Sanctuary status in recognition of its inclusive ethos, which is much appreciated by many FODI service users.

**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 Fanni or Farkhunda.

**Links for Life funded by Sunderland City Council**

After a successful bid with Sunderland City, we were awarded Links for Life funding to run five projects for the year, starting in January 2024.

The five projects are:

 • GYM GENIUS, These fitness classes are held by Chris Fish, an experienced fitness instructor who previously worked with asylum seekers in Stockton on Teesside; he uses portable equipment so a gym can be set up in a convenient place. FODI purchased the equipment with the International Care Board (ICB) funding to allow our service users, comprising 15 women and 15 men, to train in 10 separate sessions; those who regularly attended the sessions and knew how to use this portable training equipment went away with equipment to continue on the fitness journey in the comfort of their home.

• FIT KAT EXERCISE CLASSES. This project was held at The Co op Centre, which has a gym. Katrina Brown, our facilitator, runs separate women’s and men’s gym sessions. These are popular classes, and Katrina proves she knows how to work with people from different backgrounds.

 • SEWING PROJECT This started as a need by some of our service users asking for sewing machines to use at home. As a result of this demand, the group was instigated under the previous FODI manager, Sandra and later incorporated into the Links for Life project. The funding has helped to source materials for the sewing group and pay for bus fares for those who attend the sewing sessions.

 • SUNSHINE PROJECT. This will target all service users who like to participate in drumming, dancing, and sharing the food at the end of every session, involving the same service users participating in cooking under the supervision of the food facilitator Claire Wayman from Sunshine Cooperative, who supplied locally sourced vegetables. Tracey West and Mark Barfoot will be the two facilitators for drumming and dancing. Tracey, Mark, and Claire are well known to FODI staff, and most have been involved in other projects they have facilitated.

 • CITIZEN SONGWRITERS AND STORIES OF SANCTUARY PROJECT

Over the past few years, we have formed connections and collaborations with Citizen Songwriters in our community, writing and singing songs of sanctuary, including songs from the project participants' various cultural backgrounds.

**Swim and gym vouchers**

 FODI has continued to provide a once-a-week swim voucher for every adult service user who requests one and has registered for an Everyone active card. During this period, we gave out 1000 swim vouchers. From October to December, we also gave out 266 gym vouchers but discontinued this offer because of increasing costs and alternative provision of gym facilities. 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 for 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, during which 98 different service users attended matches. It is noticeable that more women are attending than in previous seasons.

Our service users are delighted with the great start that the team has made this season and we look forward to a long-overdue promotion to the Premier League.

**HAF Programme in Partnership with Together for Children Sunderland**

Children enjoyed two sessions of our Holiday Activities and Food Programme during the summer holidays. This programme was organized by Together for Children Sunderland in partnership with FODI and was funded by the Department of Education.

The programme had a range of activities, children had a chance to learn new skills, meet up with friends, and make new friends. They were also provided with tasty and nutritious meals.

Our thanks to the staff members of Together for Children Sunderland for providing this opportunity for our children.

**Sunderland Minster summer activities.**

On Tuesdays in August the children of FODI service users were invited to take part in an excellent programme organised by staff at the Minster.

**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.

**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 Tyne and Wear T&W&N Temple to run our bike project for 12 months and cover the costs of tools, repair parts, training and safety equipment.

 We are also 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 104 bikes in the period since the last AGM 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 in their physical fitness and mental well-being.

We thank Reza and Kasra for their invaluable contribution as volunteers repairing bikes. However, at the time of writing, we do not have any volunteers working on bikes, so none can be distributed.

**Christmas 2023**

FODI had a Christmas party at Sunderland Minster, with Flash the Magician returning after a long rest from entertaining FODI Children. The children were excited to have that, and we supported 300 children with Christmas boxes, which were donated to us by Sunderland Area Parent Support (SAPS) and packed with love and care. Sunderland Community Kitchen gave us 250 selection boxes to give to FODI children.

**Refugee Week 2024**

The theme this year was “Our Home”. The programme was coordinated by FODI but it could only be delivered with the support of partners. As usual, Chris’ Walk of Sanctuary kicked off the week. Other events were a football tournament organised by Young Asian Voices (YAV) and hosted by Sunderland College, a cricket match also organized by YAV, “Breakfast with a refugee” at Back on the Map, a cookery event by ICOS at Stockton Road United Reformed Church and two lunches: FODI on Wednesday, Fightback on Thursday. Finally, our service users were invited to attend without charge a showing of the film “Limbo” at Tyneside Cinema.

 **Lloyds Foundation for Organisational Development**

 This initiative will provide valuable organisational support for FODI for two years to help us bolster our resilience, governance and fundraising. Initial meetings have been held and the value of this partnership is already clear.

**Interpreting**

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**2nd August and the response.**

Sadly, mention must be made of the events of 2nd August because they seriously affected the wellbeing of our service users. Readers will know what is referred to here. While being mindful of how the riot impacted our service users everyone at FODI prefers to focus on the response from the good people of Sunderland, who are clearly a vast majority.

On 4th August this message from the Chair was posted on our website: “Everyone at FODI understands that the vast majority of people in Sunderland share our sense of shock and disgust at the events on the night of Friday 2nd August. We value our partnerships with many voluntary groups and the wonderful support we receive from the general public……We are confident that the good people of this fine city will work with us to support our service users who may be feeling particularly vulnerable at this difficult time.”

Since August the positive energy we have felt from the local community has been remarkable. The response began immediately with a statement by SAFC condemning the riot and culminated in a massive Unity in the Community event at the Minster on 19th October, at which FODI had a stall. We send a heartfelt thank you to the organisers of that event and look forward to similar events in the future.

**On behalf of the Committee**, Steve (Chair) wishes 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-ins, or donors of gifts, clothes and household items, bicycles or money.

**Challenges**

* Meeting the needs of all our service users in uncertain times following the 2024 General Election.
* Responding to increased demand generated by a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in Sunderland and their wider dispersal in and around the city.
* Ensuring delivery of a new strategic plan which maps a path to the growth of FODI
* Lack of immigration solicitors in Sunderland
* Appointing a Secretary and expanding the pool of trustees to bolster succession planning.

**FODI Committee members November 2024**

Melika Azhandeh, Abraham Eiluorior, Steve Newman, Jane Nikolarakis, Brenda Reardon, Mahnur Roushan, Talha Mahmood

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