

the **Asylum Link Merseyside** review
COVID-19 and our response

2020



Thank you

- Offering practical support and friendship to refugees and asylum seekers -

Asylum Link Merseyside

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Gareth Hankinson	Operations Manager (appointed Jan 21)
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Susan O'Hare	Housekeeper
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With special thanks to Wendy Humphry-Taylor who have assisted with financial matters and football, to Colette Byrne who has helped at Board meetings and to Barry Cooper for his assistance with fundraising.

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Introduction - Ewan Roberts

This has to have been one of the most bizarre years any of us have ever seen. It started with ALM emerging from a very lean period and plunging into the pandemic with all the ramifications that had. The changes to how we operate were enormous, however we found a way through, with caseworkers and teachers working remotely, the centre run with a skeleton crew and still working with over a thousand individuals through the period.

Maintaining services for the destitute group was a priority and by using a mixture of food, cash, vouchers and deliveries we have managed to achieve this. The Home Office have raised the prospect of evictions as the lockdown lifts and we are bracing ourselves for the effects. This, along with their new immigration proposals, makes their already hostile approach far worse.

Strictly speaking, this is less of a review of the year and more a series of diary observations through the Covid period, but it will let our friends and supporters see the massive efforts that have gone into the past 12 months.

Thank you all for the help and support provided. Ewan Roberts



The ALM Corona Diary March to May 2020

Often around this time of year, when the days are stretching out, the central heating's finally turned off and the things you planted in April that did nothing for weeks, are reaching for the skies, there's a slight panic as we realise Refugee Week is only just around the corner: where did we put the BBQ tools, did anyone book the room at Thurstaston and what's the cheapest price for a double-decker bus?

This year it will be a far less frantic affair but then that's not really a good thing. This letter is really to catch everyone up with what's been going on and look at what the rest of the year might hold.

As the news about the virus became more and more serious, we realised we would have to start closing parts, if not all of the centre, to minimise the risk of transmission through contact. The last day for the ESOL classes was set as 16th March as an early stop before the Easter break. It looks very much as if the classes won't open before September at the earliest and in the meantime we have been finding alternative ways to keep in touch and keep teaching.



When the lockdown started on the 23rd March, we tried producing takeaway meals but the numbers fell rapidly and we stopped that very quickly. Another change was moving the destitution food pickups from weekly to monthly. This reflected the need to minimise contact and travel, but also because the cash and carry's had stopped delivering all the food we were ordering. We could no longer provide everything people needed each week; also who can carry 4 weeks shopping! So

we decided to provide two weeks food alongside 2 weeks cash - £20/week. At least this way people could buy their own food.

This is actually quite a good way of being flexible with the food, but it is more expensive so we have moved again to fortnightly pickups of food only. Between 30 and 50 people have used the pick-up days during the period.

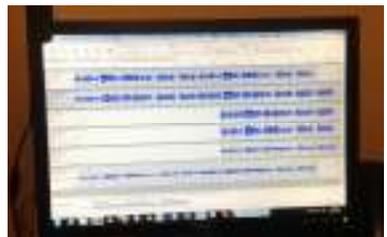
We have also started with individual food deliveries, to mums with young children, people who are self isolating and those with mobility issues as well as to the destitute. One household of 9 women had a resident with Covid, and so we began food deliveries for them. We've also distributed mail, meds, clothing and so on.



We've received enquiries for help from other organisations, primarily via MRSN who have coordinated volunteers from their newsgroup as well as from ALM, dealing with requests coming via the City Council and LCVS. Serco have failed to provide much assistance to the people they house, and then only in a dire emergency.

We've been able to buy more equipment, laptops, telephones and small PCs, which will enable more of the caseworkers to get online from home, log into the system and deal with the 40 or so calls each day for advice guidance and information. Some calls have been desperate and initially we struggled to get people housed and safe. We had some incredible help from the City Council, Councillors and MPs to escalate cases and get people off the street.

The Choir have kept in touch over a Whatsapp group and have managed to put together a couple of songs by singing into our phones and



reassembling all the individual parts at a later date. There have been a few tunes, including another we wrote ourselves; some better than others it has to be said.

The Bike Mechanics have been huddled away in garages all over Merseyside fixing inner-tubes and repairing wheels ready for emergence into the summer. Even a bit of buying and selling of Bikes on ebay. We had a lovely offer of guided bike rides when the lockdown is eased and we may not be too far off that now.



The English classes have continued over Zoom or Whatsapp with 60 Beginners and 50 Intermediate students being distance tutored by the Teachers, who have also been keeping in touch to check if people are ok and managing in these unusual times. We also used some of our emergency funding to purchase books which give the classes set texts to work from instead of scanned documents.



Contact has been important – keeping in touch and keeping together. The Teachers and Caseworkers have been staying connected with students and others. Some of our refugees have phoned the staff and volunteers to make sure we're ok!

Philippa – Social Worker “I’ve been contacted by 2 service users in the past couple of weeks – one a woman we supported into s95 accommodation last year after she had been refused multiple times and another family we helped with a referral into s17 support a few months back. Neither had any needs and just emailed to say hello, thanking us for our work and saying they’re thinking of us throughout this pandemic.

We’ve provided regular updates via Facebook and mailouts to the volunteers, as well as updating our website with Covid-19 advice and links to online learning materials for ESOL students.

The Hotels coming online in April was a bit of a surprise and there are 9 hotels in use across the North West, taking Section4 (refusal and end of process) clients as well as Section 98 (new arrivals). Initial Accommodation filled up rapidly and the first we became

aware of it was our section4 applicants being sent to a Hotel in Daresbury, just off the M56.

People were more or less dumped. The food was bad, no account was taken of diet; for example requirements for diabetics. There was no access to laundry facilities, no female hygiene products. Nor did we observe any social distancing or PPE on show. Again we pushed hard to get the statutory services involved and at least some form of scrutiny of what was taking place. We also visited and took people things they needed.



Two more hotels came on line; Southport and Hoylake. Hoylake is much closer and we were quickly able to contact local volunteers and network. The local CCG were contacted to sort out (or perhaps restate) paths into healthcare, dealing with prescriptions and medical forms.

In Hoylake, apart from a few early threats of violence, the local people have been fantastic and not only sourced clothes, games, and messages of welcome, but now produce evening meals for the 50 or so residents of the hotel. Syrian families placed on Wirral through the Relocation Programme produced a Syrian Feast at the beginning of June.

Southport has been a different matter and we heard of 2 people leaving the hotel there because of racist abuse. We are currently investigating to see if there is assistance we can provide.

There have been other 'nice' things happening – a house clearance (thank you Julie) with new furniture provided much needed wardrobes and tables for our Women's accommodation. Lever Brothers were contacted and provided a pallet of soap (thank you Anthony) which came to us, City Hearts and other charities. All in all, we have coped well during the lockdown and continued to adapt and stretch the range of services provided. It is testament not only to the volunteers and staff who work here, but also to the supporters and donors who keep us going. Thank you all.

The ALM Corona Diary June to August 2020

Hopefully everyone's doing ok and there's not too much wall climbing going on. We've been in a holding pattern for a while and the emphasis has moved from getting people housing and support,



to tackling the ongoing issues people face when isolated and lack information or other resources.

Food, food, food, more food, bagged food, sacks of deliveries to the houses, to people's front doors, to hotels, to Initial Accommodation Centres and overseas to the Wirral. The most difficult thing to deal with has been the fresh food which you have use quickly. Generally there's always been

food, food

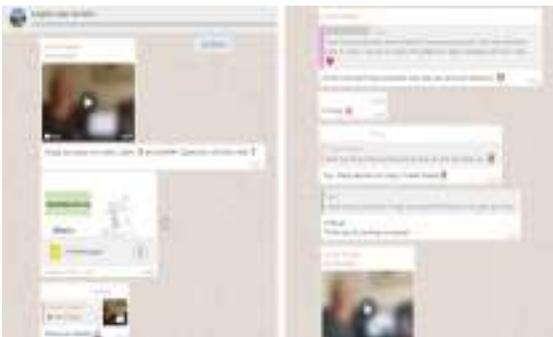


enough and when there's too much we've given it out to the volunteers, or anyone who's been able to take it. Like recycling the clothes, nothing is ever wasted.

We're indebted to Fareshare, Costco, Tesco, Jack's and all the organisations and individuals (including the West Kirby

Food Fairies & Raif and Zeli!)who contribute to the 'tonnage', including our friends at Greens for Good. More recently the

allotments have started to produce, and although it can never feed everyone, food freshly picked is something that just cheers you up. Ron and Emma have kept the plots going, and now more people are going up on a Tuesday to harvest and weed. Ron's had to fight a



rear-guard action with 'the committee' as there is a big demand for plots and we have two and a half! This, along with Bike Rides, are two of the activities we feel reasonably confident to run. The recent local Covid spikes made activity at the centre more risky, just as we were planning to slowly open again. This has put us back around a month.

The teachers wound down the classes at the end of July, but some have kept their Zoom & Whatsapp conversation groups going during the period. We had ordered books for the classes - set texts to work from at home - but half the books went missing.

After weeks of being shunted back and forward from the Book Depository,

Amazon and the delivery people

the books couldn't be found, and we got a refund. Then 2 months later, they turn up just as the classes were stopping. I guess we'll be able to use them in September. The face to face classes will not take place while there are still contact restrictions. Ventilation in the classrooms is not great and space is tight, so we'll stick to online teaching for the short to medium term. There are 26 teachers using a variety of methods, from Whatsapp, video and questionnaires, to live teaching with Zoom. Some classes ran from 9 in the morning until almost 9 at night, with people joining and leaving and rejoining, sending work in to be marked, or photographs about what they were up to.

During the last few months the Asylum Seekers placed in hotels around the region have been wondering what the future holds for them. The last we heard, the accommodation contracts have been extended through to October. There was the dreadful incident in Glasgow, where one man had a breakdown and

The Herald

Park Inn attack: Six injured in Glasgow hotel stabbing



Give refugees crossing Channel a chance, say Windrush survivors

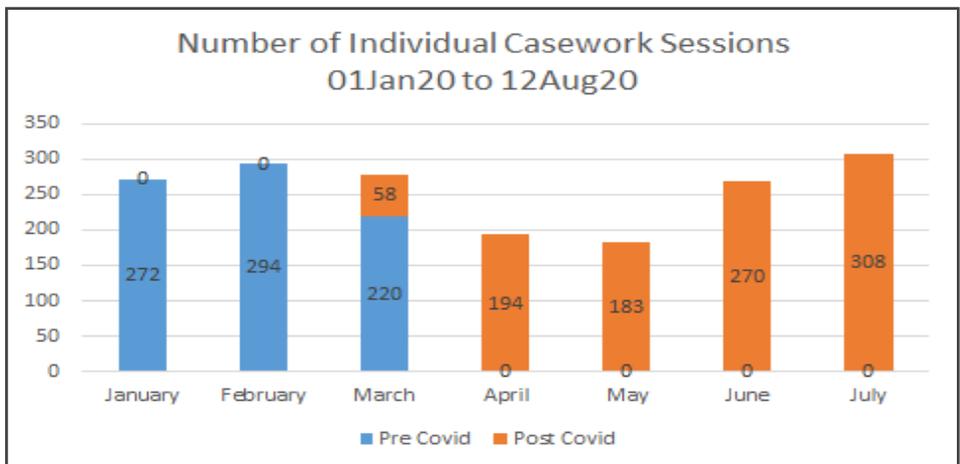
Priti Patel risks replicating Home Office failings that led to scandal, victims and human rights campaigners warn



attacked other people, before being shot dead. Described by others at the hotel as "quiet and polite and a decent guy", hundreds tried to attend the funeral of Badreddin Abadlla Adam from Sudan.

However this extreme behaviour might not come as a complete surprise; one of our own service users described the hotel where she stayed as 'like a prison'. Most of the hotels have been pretty awful; poor food, lack of contact with the outside world, lack of resources, with difficulties accessing GPs and medication.

We became aware that people were feeling depressed, even suicidal, and kept in touch with them while getting health services and others involved.



One Hotel that bucked the trend was in Hoylake, where, unlike in other places, local people were able to contact the Asylum Seekers and set up alternatives to the statutory support on offer, providing meals, clothing and friendship. Local Health Services also got involved and made sure the health pathway was clear and known to the people trying to use it. ITV Granada ran a feature which you can see here.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYjFK15AcId&feature=youtu.be

But some people are never happy, and it would be wrong to ignore the anti-asylum noises that continue to rumble on. Nigel Farage's visit to the North West seemed designed purely to stir up resentment, and following on from the Government's Hostile Environment Policy, Patel and Johnson are bent on building higher walls and changing laws, to

make it more difficult for Refugees to reach safety. Britain's obsession with immigration is gradually taking us down a pathway where 'the other, the foreigner' can be blamed for all the ills of society. Just so no one is in any doubt.

Britain takes far fewer refugees than other countries – most either stay in their country of origin and are internally displaced, or go to the country next door.

Syria 2020 – 6.2 million people not living in their own homes. 1 million Refugees in Lebanon, 750,000 in Jordan. In Yemen there are 24.3 million people in need and 3.65 million internally displaced because of the war. In the UK we had 45,000 applications for Asylum in the past year. Compared to the European Union the UK is:

6th in terms of the absolute numbers of Asylum claims (France 2nd)
18th in terms of asylum claims per head of population (France 9th)
18th in terms of asylum claims versus GDP (France 7th)

The Reason for including France in the narrative is that everyone seems to be complaining about France sending people our way. Personally I wouldn't be surprised if they did: we've not been very nice to our neighbours in recent years.

We have also seen some very harrowing and complicated cases, including trafficking, mental ill-health and self harm, which is draining. Staff and volunteers are beginning to take a break now and recharge their batteries as it's been a very long run from the spring. During all this time we have managed to keep a lot of our services running, in particular the destitution, social work and casework services. To give you an idea here are the number of casework sessions delivered from January to July.

As we move into the Autumn, there's more work to be done on the allotments and we'd really love to get going with the bikes. On a slightly sadder note, there will be no Table Tennis Team this year as the Covid restrictions make it too risky for some of our players to take part. Thanks to Dave, Davshil, Sami and all the boys for their TT efforts over the years and we hope to be back up and running in 2021/22. Thanks to everyone for all their help in the past few months.

The ALM Corona Diary September, October & into November

Who'd have thought we'd be back here again, locked up? Watching self imposed deadlines go past (Summer, September, six months) all seem to flag up the human need for milestones and targets to regulate our lives. One thing the Pandemic has perhaps given us an insight into, is what Asylum Seekers face, with unrelenting uncertainty and never being able to plan more than a couple of days ahead because there is no way of knowing what the future holds.

Since this thing started in March, we've been keeping in touch with other agencies and providers, sharing information and updating one another. This proved extremely valuable with recent attempts by the Home Office to evict and remove people. We were able to get the word out very quickly and support one another to stop much of it. Thankfully all the evictions that went to Tribunal Court have been thrown back, but there were one or two people that left their accommodation of their own volition, without realising they had an option. It shows how vital it is to know where you can get help.

Brexit is coming and with it, a probable withdrawal from the Dublin Convention. This legislation states that Asylum Seekers should make their claim in the first EU country they come to, and not travel onward. The result is that anyone who has been in the UK for less than six months (or under certain conditions, up to ten) will be returned to the EU country where they were first fingerprinted and there is a rush to get this done. Many of the people in the Hoylake hotel fell into this category and, while the Home Office said there would be no evictions from the hotels, reporting instructions were issued and people were detained when presenting in Liverpool. They couldn't even pack a bag of clothes. Others were moved to houses in Preston or Bristol, where they were then detained pending removal. Some of this was done illegally as it is against the law (rule 35) to detain someone who has been a victim of torture. Presumably the Home Office thought that moving people away from an area meant that they were out of sight, but Kath Vesey and people in Hoylake have kept in touch with their friends and been able to take action in some cases.

Sometimes it's difficult to know how to feel: there have been some fantastic things taking place, especially with Emma and the Asylum Action Project, where we got a mention in the House of Lords (thank

you Lord Randall) and for a few hours at least, were the top story on BBC2's Autumn Watch.

www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/natureuk/entries/10f5a79e-78b2-4e04-8c81-2cfeffb56f6c

A lot of the comments were very supportive which gives you hope.



Other activities in the autumn have included bike rides, some great sessions at the allotments, adventures at Beechley Stables and the beach cleans at Hoylake and Southport mentioned earlier.

There's more things planned with tree planting in mid-December, possible sailing tuition with Shadow Wind CIC, and creative writing workshops with Be There Learning.



For every up there's a down and at the beginning of October, Covid arrived in our building with 3 staff and 1 volunteer contracting the virus. Thankfully everyone is in the clear and we're now back to being vaguely open again. That shifted us from a skeleton crew to barely anyone in the office. It didn't have too much effect as most of our current services are online or by phone, but it was hard going. Maintaining assistance to the destitute, we were able to shift from providing food (which Jan and the troops can tell you takes a lot of organising, bagging and delivering), to cash payments covering our period of isolation. It's thanks to the funding bodies being more flexible that we were able to do this.

People have been extremely supportive, from the Manager at Tesco Cargo enquiring after Jan to the lovely message we had from the Costco Team in Chester.

"I know you guys are one of our favourite pick ups as you're always on time, cheerful and take whatever's going. Thanks again 😊 Regards Julie & Rhi"

Not everything is good news and sadly we have lost some friends during these strange times. Gerald Henderson passed away; many of you will know Gerald through Judith his wife and their connections with All Hallows Church. Both were and are great supporters of ALM. Diane Tod also passed away.

Diane had supported ALM with grants going back more years than I can remember and she was a formidable presence. Diane's daughter Caroline is also a strong supporter and was the force behind the Film 'Jan', about Jan Chowdhury our destitution manager.



Jan - A short documentary made in conjunction with Asylum Link Merseyside in 2017. We explore how this film has raised the awareness of the many challenges asylum seekers.

Other changes coming are in the people working here. Sarah Jope is leaving at Christmas to pursue a career in Mental Health Nursing. Sarah has been with us for a decade, as a volunteer on the front desk, caseworker, destitution manager and for the last few years as deputy manager. She will be sorely missed and difficult to replace. Sr Kathleen and Sr Ruth are both officially stepping back from their volunteer roles at the centre. There is currently too much uncertainty and risk around peoples safety for them to attend and although it'll be

great to see them back at some point, for now it's a bridge too far.

With the turn in the weather, the channel crossings will become far fewer. It was only a matter of time until someone was killed and the family of five that died in late October when their boat capsized, were not the first, but perhaps as a family with young children, considered the most newsworthy. Our Government had already ramped up the rhetoric, blaming smugglers and people traffickers, who while undoubtedly robbing people of their money and providing the boats, would have no way to do this if the UK provided safe corridors and ways to cross our border.

As we head towards the end of the year, ALM is keeping on with much of what we have already been doing since March: casework continues with the team delivering around 100 sessions per week by phone. (the phones are extremely busy so please stick with it if you can't get through) The ESOL classes are underway using Zoom and Whatsapp and we are trying to engage people in the Hotels with translated guides to our services. The



Homeless are still being fed and Jan and her band of helpers have done a fantastic job. And we're still trying to get winter clothes to people: Babs, Ian, Kooshi and Sue have worked like Trojans sorting and bagging - currently delivery is the difficult bit.

So, again, thank you to everyone: the staff, volunteers and trustees that keep us running, the funders, donors and individuals who ensure the lights stay on, to everyone who gives their time to help. And to the Asylum Seekers and Refugees for their patience and understanding.



At the checkpoint, Ali saw the boat for the first time. An engineer by training, he realised that although it was around 10-12 metres, it relied on a single small engine. When he protested, he says the smuggler dismissed him, replying: "You think you're smarter than the German guy who sold this boat to me?"

The passengers piled in. "The boat was full of people, you couldn't move any further than 1cm." Children separated from their parents began to cry. As Ali had predicted, the motor broke. The Ferret, Oct 20, by Julia Rampen

The ALM Corona Diary November & December

The turn of the year is coming at us like a train and as the news about Corona seems to be getting worse, at least we're past the shortest day and we can look forward, longingly, to Spring in a couple of months. Sadly, we lost Brother Eamonn, one of the founders of ALM and his funeral took place in December. Since the last diary, we've had some great trips and activities with the Action



Asylum project and there's plenty of that to come but Philippa, one of our Social Workers, decided to take the idea of a contribution to the diary literally and so here's a week in the life of a caseworker.

Monday *Monday mornings for most of us at ALM in 2020 mean logging on from home, alone. The ALM phone rings and is almost immediately picked up by someone else before I get to it. I've no idea who has taken the call but it's a reminder that that call isn't ringing in my house alone, it's ringing in homes across Merseyside and being picked up by any one of a small bunch of invaluable volunteers. Our volunteers are such a constant presence, but they're never taken for granted.*

My first task is to assess an Iraqi family living with multiple disabilities. I call a Sorani speaking volunteer and find he's in Aldi doing his weekly shop. He calls me back as soon as he gets home and, thanks to him, we're able to communicate the complexities of their situation in their own language.

I log off around 5.30pm and start making dinner for my kids. Around 6pm my phone rings and it's a volunteer, working into his evening. He hands over harrowing details of a case he picked up this afternoon involving domestic violence. This kind of work is not for the faint hearted and I'm once again blown away that our volunteers choose to keep turning up to do this when they could be with family, focusing on their day job or enjoying their retirement. Instead they choose to immerse themselves in a side of life in the UK that few people can bear to look into.

Tuesday *This is my office day and my priority is a woman who was trafficked to a house in the UK almost a year ago and hasn't left it since. She escaped a few days ago and found herself in a foreign country in the grips of a pandemic. Whilst I'm making calls on her behalf, I'm keenly aware that she is sitting alone downstairs. Lockdown means our centre is almost empty and my heart breaks for her. I call a volunteer who immediately agrees to spend the day with her, dropping her own considerable responsibilities to make time for a woman she has never met. She learns that hair and beauty are important to this woman, notices how matted her hair has become and, in a striking act of kindness, takes her to a hair salon and pays to get her hair done. A simple but powerful gesture that starts this woman's journey back to reclaiming her body back as her own.*

Late morning a call comes in from another volunteer taking the lead on a complex case about a man recently discharged from a



Action Asylum: The past 2 months have seen us wind down the Action Asylum project, but not before a last push: a day Tree planting and Hill Walking in Todmorden, the last day at the allotments (which went on for 3 weeks!) a bike ride through Sefton Park with Santa and his musical Bike as well as Sail Training with Shadow Wind down at the Albert Dock. We also had a catch up with the Refugee Council in Sheffield to talk about expanding the project.

psychiatric ward. It's a mostly new area for this volunteer to work in but she's doing an amazing job. She says she wants to stick with this case to the end and puts herself forward for more complex casework in future. Like so much of what our volunteers do, this is above and beyond what's required of her and it's humbling to be around.

Wednesday A pop up appears on my screen; "Caseworkers, prepare to meet thy zoom." This makes me smile. The volunteer who manages our weekly zoom link always takes time to write up a humorous title. We never really acknowledge it but he keeps it up, week after week and I, for one, really appreciate it.

This meeting is the only time each week we see each others' faces, with many volunteers joining on their day off. This week, one volunteer talks about her efforts to contact a client we fear has gone missing. Another feeds back on a complicated case involving a woman with two nationalities. We discuss a series of calls we've had from a particularly disgruntled client who has been throwing choice words and threats at all of us at some point during the past week or so. These discussions help us plan our work and, perhaps more importantly, give us a space to debrief about the issues that are weighing most heavily on us that week.

My day ends and this is me done for another week. I don't work Thursdays or Fridays but there's still so much going on. I fire off an email to the casework volunteer with a list of tasks I haven't got around to. It's both comforting to know that I can sign off, confident in the knowledge that my outstanding tasks will be picked up by capable and compassionate hands.

Thursday It's my day off but I'm attached to our What'sApp group which is has messages pinging back and forth from everyone working from their own homes. I see a thread of messages about a caseworker heading off-line as she is taking food and cash to a client at the train station. Another is sending her sister in law to visit a client with food and medical supplies in another borough. There's excitement as a volunteer shares that he's secured free school meals for two asylum seeking families, another client has been granted status and another lets us know her husbands coming to the office with a delivery of homemade face masks for us to distribute.

I know there is so much more going on that isn't making the group chat and won't be recorded in case notes. This is the space given to allow

clients to talk about parts of their story that have no bearing on the tasks we're doing, but we know they need to share. The comforting words spoken when people cry about dire situations. The moments spent letting someone run out of steam as they shout at us, silently acknowledging the need to vent their frustration and anger. The load our volunteers carry is difficult and demanding and I'm in awe of them all.

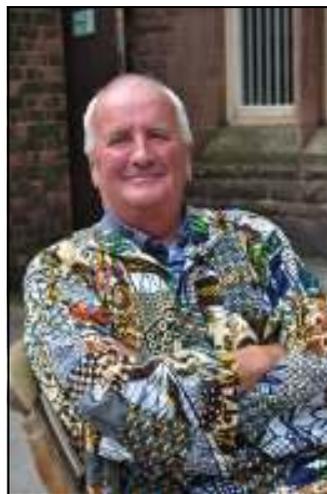
Friday *I think back to a passing comment made by a volunteer earlier in the week. She mentioned that she'd found the previous week particularly difficult and I gave her a call. We speak about how heavy it can feel to carry the weight of our clients' problems and how we feel a sense of survivors' guilt. We know there's very little we can do to change that and we don't come up with any solutions.*

Although nothing changes we come away with is a sense of connection and solidarity and I'm reminded that, even in the face of the injustices we challenge daily, there is much humanity to be found too. For me, this is personified in our volunteers at ALM and I feel an immense sense of privilege and gratitude to be working alongside them.

We all share the sentiments expressed by Philippa and cannot thank our volunteers enough for their hard work across the year.

It was Eamonn's funeral on the 14th of December. His passing has left everyone feeling slightly dislocated as he was a constant presence at the centre, from early every morning, greeting people as they arrived, and enjoying the best part of the day. Several students spoke at the service and their sense of loss, of a friend, a brother, and a father, was clear for everyone to see. One said that the most precious thing Eamonn had to give was his time, and he did not begrudge it to anyone who needed it. It made people feel cared for and appreciated.

So that was 2020. Not an easy year to navigate but we got there in the end, so thank you once again to everyone who has helped and supported us through these testing times. Over the next week we'll start to wind down and take a break. Have a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year. From everyone at ALM



The ALM Corona Diary January and February

Since Christmas, there has been a perceptible shift in the atmosphere, as if the frustration and anger stored up in people has been let loose. Driven by a feeling of being swept along by things we can't change, this is the closest many of us will get to experiencing what it is like to be an asylum seeker. Nothing is within your control and the decisions and restrictions affecting life



are all made elsewhere. When the Covid lockdown was imposed again, we continued with the monthly food pickup for the destitute, including vouchers in the support package, as carrying four weeks worth of food is nigh on impossible. Monthly visits minimised the risks associated with contact and travel. And of course the food deliveries are still available for the most vulnerable.

We are still receiving requests for clothes as new people arrive in the city or old clothes wear out.

As January progressed, there was an increase in cases of Domestic Violence, fights in shared accommodation and people in ever more complex circumstances. We reached a point in February where we stopped dealing with new cases for a week and restricted access to the phone lines. This allowed us to concentrate on the difficult cases already underway and helped reset the clock. Sometimes you need to step back a bit to gain a

bit of perspective.

We also realised that other agencies were experiencing the same pressures. Referrals came in from charities who would normally deal with things themselves. Most telling of all, LDAS Liverpool Domestic Abuse Services, cut access to some of their provision. It paints quite a stark picture of a community under enormous strain.

Speaking to Pete Tregilgas, a volunteer and friend at All Saints Church, we both shared a common sense of weariness at the times we are going through. Everyone's tired.

So what's to be done? The first thing is to realise that we can't get off this particular bus, and like many things in life, we just have to deal with it the best way we can. Secondly, there's a certain strength that comes from knowing we're all experiencing the same thing; that we're not alone. And thirdly, and more importantly, to get back on the horse and move forward.

We asked the caseworkers and teachers if they could think of one word that described the past couple of months. The teachers nearly exploded: ONE WORD! Come off it. But most managed. The caseworkers were more succinct but nonetheless found it a challenge to describe the times we are in with just one word.

However it is the collective effect that is most striking and the word that emerged top of the list will not come as a complete surprise.

Quite a few people got leave to remain in the new year: great news, but for some of our volunteers still waiting for resolution, they have seen people arriving after them, getting decisions before them, and this must be incredibly frustrating.

Alhussein at MRSN had some fabulous news. He's now a daddy with a beautiful baby girl, Amina, who arrived mid-January. One of



our friends from years past, Emma Atherton also had another gorgeous babe - little Fern.

So with Hopefulness in mind, we've pushed off again, opening up the phone lines and trying new solutions for old problems. We're getting low on men's clothes so we've decided to take donations again (but only for men's clothing and if possible waterproof trousers!) With the lighter days arriving, we're back



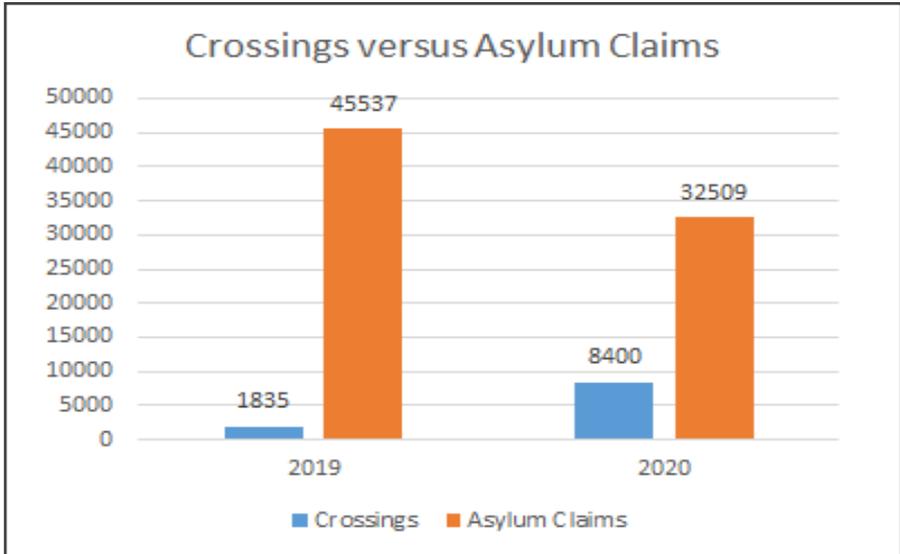
up at the allotment. Ron's out of hibernation (stylish red hat) and ready with the beans and sweet peas. Someone lovely has donated a new shed! We have beach cleans and tree planting sessions in the pipeline so keep an eye out for information.

The hands opposite belong to Sue and Kooshi, who took time off tidying up, to pod the beans that have been drying over winter in one of the classrooms. It feels good to be looking forward again and even though Covid restrictions are still largely in place, we can see Spring and Summer on the horizon and can start making plans for furnishing the 2nd floor offices, pulling mothballed chairs and desks out of the attic, as well as anticipating the trips, visits and other outdoors activities.

But there are also some darker things looming. Priti Patel has decided she will 'Fix our Broken Asylum System', but not in the way we would like it. In a speech to the Conservative Party Conference she deliberately mixed up claiming Asylum with Illegal Migration, choosing to say nothing of the poverty, poor housing, destitution, isolation and misery faced by those in the system.

Nothing about the number of successful appeals to immigration decisions. Instead she concentrated on the arrivals from other places, playing to the fears, insecurities and myths believed by

her target audience. We complained to the BBC last year when they led with the headline of more people than ever coming across the channel by boat, but without telling people that asylum claims were actually falling.



So the impression was given, once again that we were being over-run. The fact that the only reason people are coming by small boat, is that plane, ferry and tunnel crossings have become restricted by Covid, hardly gets a mention. Or that overall numbers are lower. If the Home Secretary was serious in her attempts, as she says, to deprive people smugglers of an income, she should arrange safe travel corridors, rather than forcing people to take ever more extreme risks.



Channel migrants: 17 people enter UK on two small boats. 28Jan2021
Immigration minister Chris Philp said migrants "should be claiming asylum in the first safe country they reach"

And so we are to have yet another Immigration Bill coming, but one which is set to be more draconian than all the rest, if that is possible. And what can we do about it?

It's as if an accident of geography somehow removes our obligation to help.

One thing is to keep putting the stories out there, to continue to inform one another

about what we see and how it affects the people we work with. To provide a platform, for the Asylum Seekers and Refugees, who want to speak out, to voice their opinions and experiences. To keep on with the positive and life enhancing projects like Action Asylum, bringing local people and newcomers into contact to debunk the myths and the lies surrounding Asylum Seeking.

Later this year we will take part in a campaign to raise these issues headed by Asylum Matters, www.asylummatters.org demonstrating the iniquity and damaging effects of current asylum policy. We also hope to organise a relay walk between here and Moreton Hall in Lincolnshire, our nearest Immigration Detention



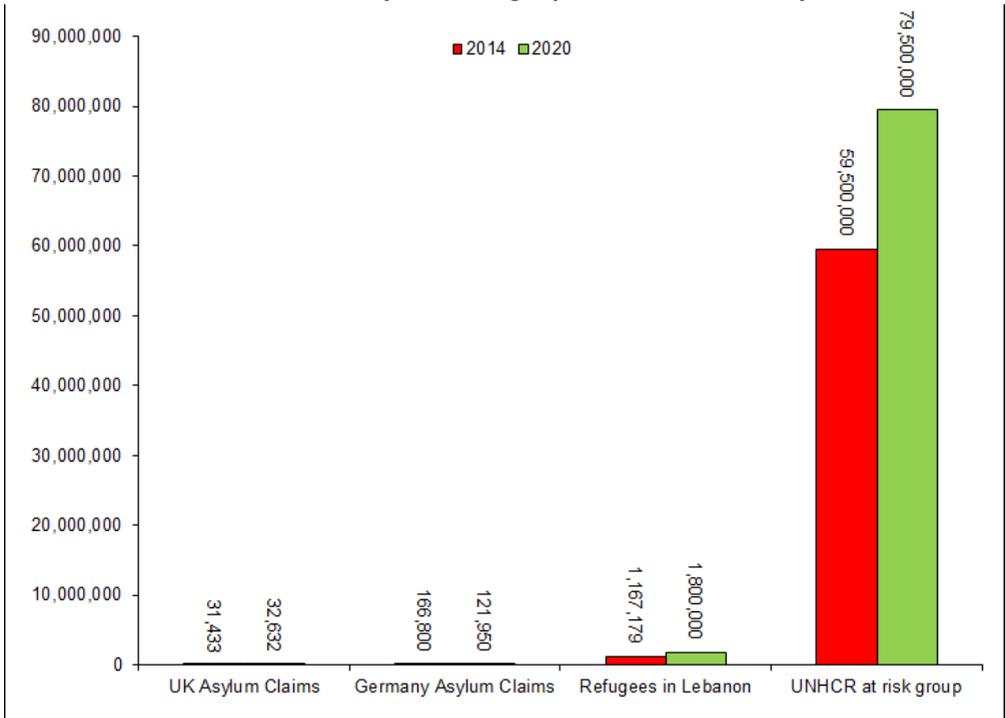
Centre, via Cities and Towns of Sanctuary on the route, to highlight to problems Asylum Seekers face every day.

Lastly, during the grey winter months, some hardy souls have been flying the flag for Refugees, with small protest walks through Liverpool City Centre, to the Home Office in Old Hall Street. Well done to all of you: tough cookies. Thanks to everyone who has continued to help us through these difficult times and lets look forward to a better New Year.



Asylum Statistics

Of all the numbers quoted about Asylum in the UK, you will never hear a politician comparing the UK's contribution to the likes of Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey. In the graph below it is easy to see how



we compare with the rest of the world. Were it not for the numbers printed on the graph, we would not even be able to see the UK's asylum population on this scale.

In its recent 'New Plan for Immigration' document, the Government seems inordinately proud of its resettlement programme, having brought 25,000 refugees into the country since 2015. In the same period, there were 230,000 claims for Asylum in the UK of which around half will be upheld. There is no rationale for the Government's plan to restrict arrivals to the small resettlement programmes. The scale of the problem is too great to treat it in this way. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972517/CCS207_CCS0820091708-001_Sovereign_Borders_Web_Accessible.pdf

ALM Accounts to June 2020

Income and Expenditure

Asylum Link Merseyside

Statement of Financial Activities for the Year Ended 30 June 2020 (Including Income and Expenditure Account and Statement of Total Recognised Gains and Losses)

	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2020 £
Income and Endowments from:				
Donations and legacies	3	181,710	178,107	359,817
Charitable activities	4	29,494	-	29,494
Investment income	5	38	-	38
Other income		9,309	-	9,309
Total income		220,551	178,107	398,658
Expenditure on:				
Charitable activities		(4,827)	(28,360)	(33,187)
Other expenditure	6	(221,287)	(122,535)	(343,822)
Total expenditure		(226,114)	(150,895)	(377,009)
Net (expenditure)/income		(5,563)	27,212	21,649
Transfers between funds		65,983	(65,983)	-
Net movement in funds		60,420	(38,771)	21,649
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward		25,830	76,679	102,509
Total funds carried forward	15	86,250	37,908	124,158
	Note	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2019 £
Income and Endowments from:				
Donations and legacies	3	146,308	182,160	328,668
Charitable activities	4	35,323	-	35,323
Investment income	5	39	-	39
Other income		14,715	-	14,715
Total income		196,385	182,160	378,745
Expenditure on:				
Charitable activities		(6,596)	(18,805)	(25,401)
Other expenditure	6	(274,372)	(121,245)	(395,617)
Total expenditure		(280,968)	(140,050)	(421,018)
Net (expenditure)/income		(84,383)	42,110	(42,273)
Transfers between funds		47,525	(47,525)	-
Net movement in funds		(36,858)	(5,415)	(42,273)
Reconciliation of funds				
Total funds brought forward		62,688	82,094	144,782
Total funds carried forward	15	25,830	76,679	102,509

ALM Accounts to June 2020

Balance Sheet

Asylum Link Merseyside

(Registration number: 04468629)
Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2020

	Note	2020 £	2019 £
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	12	1,829	2,599
Current assets			
Debtors	13	434	5,034
Cash at bank and in hand		<u>122,590</u>	<u>95,571</u>
		123,024	100,605
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	14	<u>(695)</u>	<u>(695)</u>
Net current assets		<u>122,329</u>	<u>99,910</u>
Net assets		<u>124,158</u>	<u>102,509</u>
Funds of the charity:			
Restricted funds		37,796	76,679
Unrestricted income funds			
Unrestricted funds		<u>86,362</u>	<u>25,830</u>
Total funds	15	<u>124,158</u>	<u>102,509</u>

For the financial year ending 30 June 2020 the charity was entitled to exemption from audit under section 477 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Directors' responsibilities:

- The members have not required the charity to obtain an audit of its accounts for the year in question in accordance with section 476; and
- The directors acknowledge their responsibilities for complying with the requirements of the Act with respect to accounting records and the preparation of accounts.

These accounts have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime.

The financial statements on pages 6 to 16 were approved by the trustees, and authorised for issue on 14/4/21 and signed on their behalf by:


Denia Kincade
Company Secretary

Once again, thank you to all our wonderful supporters, funders, volunteers, staff, trustees and helpers who have given unstintingly of their time and resources to keep us on the road

THANK YOU ALL

