

the **Asylum Link Merseyside**

2021

covid-19 diary part 7



Opening up Slowly!

The ALM Corona Diary - June July August September

These last few months have felt more like marking time than anything else. When the lifting of restrictions took place in July, we decided not to open the drop in, keeping the services currently running as invitation only access. This was due to the Covid infection rate remaining high. June saw the return of small face to face English Classes, with one class of 6 per day, morning and afternoon. In August, the teachers, who have been going pretty continuously all year without a break, closed things down for the summer and registration is now taking place for the Autumn Session. A small group of teachers kept the conversation classes going and gave people a continuous point of contact

Also in late June was the 2nd Vaccination day and thank you to David Lewis and his team from the Vauxhall Health Centre for their time and hard work in bringing this together. It was a lovely surprise to have singers from the Liverpool Lighthouse Theatre group drop by for a few tunes.

Starting up around this time were taster sessions with the Climbing Hanger in Speke. This is an indoor climbing centre, where the Action Asylum project started taking people on a Wednesday and which has continued with bigger numbers into the Autumn. And of course the allotments were in full swing with regular visits and new drivers, Mike H, Hugh and Pete taking people up to Dunbabin on a Wednesday. There's something very comforting about the allotments, when



everyone stops for a cuppa and people are able to relax with friends, sharing a story or two, learning about growing techniques or trying out someone's jam and biscuits. It makes you wonder why we don't do it more often?



The bike mechanics are back, refreshed and ready, ratchets in hand. Around 30 bicycles have been given out in the last few months, coming from old and donated bikes repaired during the lockdowns. Our

fledgling Cycle Club has just applied to the Big Bike Revival fund for further funding helped by CyclingUK, and have started planning rides with Hearts4 Refugees on Wirral. We are re-starting our regular weekly rides from late September. In August we partnered with the council and locals in Bootle to help clear up in Derby Park. Julia Rampen from IMIX videoed the day and you can find out more about it here: www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-transform-historic-park-in-bootle/



For people following ALM over the last year, you will have seen more and more of these projects, where Asylum Seekers are matched to organisations and activities not normally associated with Refugees. This is done under the banner of Action Asylum, and follows on from work done with Anthony Steen and the Task Force Trust and colleagues in the Red Cross back in 2019.

The purpose is 2-fold: firstly it gives Asylum Seekers something to do. Kept in poverty and prohibited from working, it offers a way to distract and engage people, providing a sense of purpose, helping physical and mental health. It helps with language, local knowledge and cultural acclimatisation. Secondly, and this is rather sad, it helps humanise Asylum Seekers. For many people in the UK, an Asylum Seeker is an abstract concept, someone sneaking across the border or hiding in a lorry. However, meeting an Asylum Seeker and working alongside them, sharing lunch and common purpose, means they are viewed differently. They become individuals with names, families, jobs and interests, a million miles from the shadowy figures portrayed in the press.

This past month has seen a lot of work with the media, from the Asylum Evictions starting again as the 'Everyone In' policy ceases, to the tragedy in Afghanistan. In July a small but determined band marched through Liverpool, asking for an end to the misery of Reporting. Wilson was at the forefront and related the story of how his disabled son was traumatised by the experience of detention. After slots on



Granada and BBC NW, we were invited on to GB News at the behest of one Nigel Farage, to bring “balance” to their reporting. Lets hope so.

We had some great visits from Paula Barker our MP, to talk through some issues and ways forward, and from David Neal, Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, where we were able raise our concerns about the current system and the new Immigration Bill in Parliament.



As we move into the Autumn, we are doing so cautiously with Covid in mind and we will monitor the situation as the English classes start and the numbers begin to build through the centre, so that we remain as safe as possible, at the same time as being accessible.

The Merseyside Refugee Support Network MRSN have been extremely busy with new clients and have recently finalised the new Fact not Fiction leaflet about Asylum Seekers and Refugees, with a School friendly version available as well.



For the last seven years, ALM has worked alongside MRSN, sharing the office and working in ever closer ways with our clients, on projects, EU programmes and placements. Margaret McAdam working at the Network for the last 15 years, has become a friend, advocate and mentor for hundreds of people passing through that small office each year and it is with sadness that, after many years of putting it off, Margaret has finally decided to hang up her Biro.

Seana. “Colleagues and clients send their love, thanks and best wishes to our amazing Margaret McAdam. She is and has always been an amazing advocate and fighter of human rights.” Good luck Marg.

As we look forward to the Queen’s Volunteering Award at the Town Hall, it’s in the realisation that the effect ALM has, is far greater than the sum of its parts but that we also have more parts than we could ever imagine! Thank you all for playing your part.