



**West End Refugee Service**

*strength through support*



## **WERS Newsletter Issue 83 October 2020**

### **A RETURN TO FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITY**

We are very happy to be open again for face-to-face drop-ins and appointments, seeing clients in person in a safe environment. We have introduced triaging at the door - these volunteers give clients a warm welcome and identify support needed, alongside various safety measures.



Our support worker Ali sees a client in his office.

Drop-ins are held Monday and Wednesday mornings, and afternoon appointments deal with more complex issues. We continue to offer support over the telephone, regular outreach to our most vulnerable clients, and continue with food parcels, clothing and toiletry requests - a big thank you to all who have donated toiletries. We continue to use pre-payment cards for hardship payments, with additional phone credit included. From November, clients will have access to wifi and desktop computers at WERS.



Volunteers sorting clothing bundles for clients. Clothes are now distributed via referrals.

### **SKILLSMATCH SESSIONS**

After a pause in community volunteering activity during lockdown, it has been great to be able to start sessions again. We've recently run three volunteering sessions at local community gardens and are starting to see an increased demand for this project. Many refugees and asylum seekers in Newcastle are keen to re-engage safely with their local communities after months of lockdown measures.



Apple Picking at Scotswood Garden

### **WORKING THROUGH COVID TO SUPPORT REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS**

Whilst infection rates are on the rise in Newcastle and surrounding areas, as long as we are able to continue to offer support safely face-to-face, we will do so. We're aware that our services are needed more than ever.

The impact of Covid-19 on the people we support is obviously huge. It is still harder for people to access support due to the challenges for services to run safely at previous capacity, lack of access to internet/IT is a big barrier for people, the Home Office have a backlog of cases meaning people seeking asylum are waiting long periods for a decision, and there are significant issues with accommodation including an increased use of hotels. These practical issues alongside the current narrative coming out of government and much of the mainstream media, make asylum seekers and refugees in the UK more vulnerable than ever to experiencing discrimination, exclusion, poverty and isolation.

We are determined to continue offering support in all areas that we can - to respond to these intensified needs and to continue to raise awareness of the challenges faced by those we support, helping to make the North East a more welcome place for refugees. You, as our supporters, are an essential part of this. So, thank you!

## FESTIVE WEEK APPEAL

It's that time again! We are asking for donations of basic items to make up parcels for people in receipt of our hardship fund. We give these out during our 'festive week' – leading up to the holiday period.

This year this support is needed more than ever. Covid-19, as we all know, has exacerbated the inequalities that exist in our communities. The people on our hardship fund are amongst those who have been hardest hit.



Festive week volunteers in a previous year

**Items needed:** Men's socks, shampoo, shower gel & deodorant, toothbrushes & toothpaste and chocolate. Women's shower gel, shampoo, deodorant & socks. These clients are mostly male, so items for men are needed most.

Deadline for receiving items is **1 December**.

We know this can seem early, but we'll need to safely store, sort and assemble donations ready to give out in the week's leading up the Christmas Period. We can accept deliveries between 10 and 1pm, Mon to Thurs – this guarantees that staff and volunteers are in the building to receive these.

### Donations to Hardship Fund

We also always aim to give destitute clients additional payments from the Hardship fund over the Christmas period. Again, this year, this feels more important than ever to do. If you would like to make financial donations towards this additional 'festive fund', please visit our Just Giving page: <https://www.justgiving.com/wers>

And if you'd like to support WERS whilst you shop over the festive period, please sign up to *amazon smile* &/or *giveasyoulive*.



## WELCOME TO ALISON AND LANA



Alison Jelf & Lana Kareem



In order to continue the new support for clients that we introduced during lockdown alongside our usual services and projects, and to provide some much-needed administrative support, we have brought in two additional part-time staff for a six-month period. Lana has been volunteering with us as a *skillsmatch* buddy and Alison is a befriender. We are delighted they have joined us on the team during this time. A big thank you to the Barrow Cadbury Trust and National Lottery Community Fund for making one of these posts possible.

## WERS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our annual general meeting will be hosted on zoom this year on **Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 7pm on Zoom**.

If you would like to attend, please register in advance for this meeting:

<https://zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tJElduyppj4rHd3TVum8e1Jkwr0Nn6XAgHNC>

If you receive a hard copy of this newsletter, please email [info@wers.org.uk](mailto:info@wers.org.uk) if you would like an electronic version of this link sent to you. We hope you are able to join us.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support, from all the team at WERS. We wish you all the best during the festive period.

### Follow WERS on Facebook and Twitter.

If you're not already connected with us on social media, you can 'follow' us on Twitter and 'Like' us on Facebook: **@WestEndRefugee** where you can receive information, regular updates and news on the work we are doing as well as on broader, current issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees in the UK.

