



Churches Together in the Merseyside Region

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Support for Asylum Seekers
CTMR – Churches Together in the Merseyside Region
Registered Charity Number 519061



Dear Friends,

Report – May 2021

For this newsletter in addition to the regular reports we receive from our partner agencies, we have received interesting contributions from long standing friends and supporters of SAS or ALM.

Sister Ruth Miller, SND recalls her memories at the ALM “shop” and Barbara Gwynne brings those memories up to date with her report on providing clothes to people housed in hotels and hostels during the pandemic.

Emma Leaper (Action Asylum and ALM) tells us about her tree-planting expedition with a party of volunteers to Ripponden, West Yorkshire.

Isobel Betchka recalls in “Angels in our Midst” the troubles her own family had seeking asylum in the past, and laments the present situation and treatment of present day strangers to the UK.

Once again our partner agencies report on the marvellous practical support they have been providing to their clients during the pandemic. As well as the humanitarian support, we hear about some of the wellbeing activities which provide some dignity and hope to their clients at a dreadful time in their lives.

Recently I googled the date for Refugee Week 2021 (which is 14th to 20th June 2021) and found this year’s theme is “We cannot walk alone”.

There was a reference to Martin Luther King’s historic ‘I have a dream’ speech when he turns his attention to the white people who, realising their destiny and that of their black fellow citizens was intertwined, joined the movement for equal rights. ‘They have come to realise that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom,’ he said. ‘We cannot walk alone.’

Well it is certainly difficult to “Walk Alone “ in Liverpool at the best of times but this year it is especially an opportunity and an invitation to extend our hand to someone new. Someone who is outside our current circle, who has had an experience we can only imagine.

The pandemic has shown how interconnected we all are – that the wellbeing of each of us depends on the welfare, and safety of others. We are part of a shared ‘us’.

Sadly those UK officials who have drafted the New Immigration Plan 2021 do not seem to share that sentiment. The protection of the public purse seems a much higher priority than the protection of those unfortunate people risking their lives in seeking sanctuary in UK. Let us hope and pray that there are some voices of sanity within the corridors of power who will be listened to.

So let us start with Isobel’s considered and deeply passionate account of “Angels in Our Midst.”

Isobel Betchka

[Isobel is a longstanding supporter of SAS and a volunteer at Asylum Link Merseyside]

Presidents

The Most Rev’d Malcolm McMahon, The Archbishop of Liverpool
The Right Rev’d Paul Bayes, The Bishop of Liverpool
The Rev’d Dr Sheryl M Anderson, Chair of the Liverpool Methodist District
The Incumbent, Moderator of the Mersey Synod of the United Reformed Church
The Rev’d Phil Jump, Regional Minister, North West Baptist Association
Major Roger Batt, North West England & North Wales Divisional Commander, Salvation Army

(Churches Together in the Merseyside Region is a registered charity, No.519061)

Angels in Our Midst

My parents in law had fled the Russian pogroms of the early 20th century and my great-grandparents fled the Irish famine; so it is no surprise that I should be very sympathetic to vulnerable people seeking refuge on our shores. We live in a world torn by strife of every kind so neither should it be a surprise to us now that, once again, we are being asked to take in the dispossessed and desperate.

However, we, the British, somehow see ourselves, simultaneously, as a major global power - and as a small island, whose culture is being eroded, livelihoods are being stolen and territory is being swallowed-up by foreigners, bent on living off the fat of our land. The foreigners differ from us in almost every way - ethnicity, culture and religion. Their ways are not our ways and we do not wish their ways to corrupt what it means to be British.

We forget, at times, that, in two most important ways, these foreigners are exactly like us! First, they are human beings, with basic need for shelter, food and warmth - for family, friends and the opportunity to earn with dignity their daily bread. Second, and most important, is the fact that we say that we believe them to be, like us, the children of God and, therefore, despite all our differences, our brothers and sisters.

What should our response be to the people who come to our shores seeking sanctuary?

The Christian response is obvious - we should welcome them. We hear from the Old Testament and the New that welcoming strangers can give us the opportunity to meet with Angels in disguise - or even with Christ Himself.

Practically speaking, things are different, we tell ourselves. The media reminds us that our country is too small! It is full already! That is not true. We welcome foreigners with loads of money and have allowed them to buy up half of London.

Our country is not rich enough to give help to those seeking asylum or refuge, we protest. Again - this is untrue. We are the 4th richest country in the world, even taking COVID into account.

Those seeking asylum or refuge don't need to come if they have enough money to pay traffickers! Seekers of asylum or refuge are not always fleeing poverty but usually threats to their lives.

The real seekers of asylum or refuge should come by legitimate routes by applying to our embassies in the countries they are fleeing from. In most cases, there are no British Embassies remaining in the countries from which they are escaping and, if there were, it might be too dangerous for them to be seen approaching that embassy.

We have not, in fact, provided any safe, legitimate means for those seeking asylum or refuge to apply for permission to come here.

Some criminals are entering Britain amongst those seeking asylum or refuge. That may be true but we can't treat all of the people who arrive as potential criminals. Where there is suspicion of criminality, there are the means to investigate and deport those found guilty.

What about our own poor and homeless? Looking after our own poor should not remove our duty to care for those seeking asylum or refuge.

These questions, and more, dull the strength of our determination to respond, as Christians and other people of Faith, to the shocking conditions under which those seeking asylum and refuge in our country are living, and the disgraceful callousness with which they are regarded by those in whose power they reside.

I wish to inform, or remind, you of some of these conditions.

People crossing the Channel in frail crafts, or risking suffocation in vehicles to reach Britain, must be desperate. They often come here because they have family or friends already settled here. Contrary to popular opinion, they are not obliged to apply for sanctuary in the first country they land in. That would be ridiculous as it would mean that a handful of countries bordering war-torn regions would be even more overwhelmed than they are already. Britain takes a very small number of people seeking asylum or refuge when compared with our European neighbours, so many must have chosen other countries in which to settle.

Upon arrival, the 'processing' of those seeking asylum or refuge depends upon how they have entered the country. This in turn depends on where they are first found to be here. They could become the responsibility of the Local Authority into which they have been 'dropped'. If they have arrived through an airport or port, they are likely to be removed to a detention centre where they might remain until their application is agreed or rejected. (I will not go into the detail of detention centres but, if you wish to follow it up, and to comprehend the dreadfully dehumanising conditions within them, you can follow the link www.righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit and select "Detention").

Young people (predominantly male) are checked as to their status as juveniles or adults. The means of deciding this seems to be ad hoc. How old do they seem to the Home Office employee interviewing them? Here we must consider - should that employee have received professional guidance about the effect that war, danger, hunger, persecution, fear, adult responsibility, trauma might have upon the bearing, physique and attitude of a teenage boy, or, more rarely, girl? There are also physical and cultural differences between the teenagers seeking asylum or refuge and our own. Yet, upon the decision of the Home Office employee often unaware of these differences, the fate of many teenagers seeking asylum or refuge will depend. Will they be free to enter education, to study, to grow or will they be sent to a detention centre, which is no place for any traumatised person let alone an adolescent?

The Home Office is obliged to provide those seeking asylum or refuge with accommodation. Instead of adequately funding local authorities to source and regulate such accommodation, the government has put that provision out to tender and private companies are now in charge. The aim of a private company is to make a profit and so we should not be surprised to find that many people seeking asylum or refuge are living in squalid conditions while the companies providing their accommodation are making a handsome profit, at taxpayers' expense.

Mysteriously, people seeking asylum or refuge are housed in poorer areas, where housing is cheap, unemployment high and local facilities already stressed. Residents in leafy suburbs and idyllic villages are rarely given the opportunity to meet them or to share their amenities with them.

Those seeking asylum or refuge are not allowed to work. They receive £35.00 a week to cover everything and that includes food, clothes and transport and in particular paying their fares on public transport to one of the Home Office Centres, every month or, for some, every week, to sign-on: in itself a necessary means of the Home Office keeping track of applicants. However, given that there are ONLY FOURTEEN CENTRES in England, ONE Centre and a few police stations for reporting purposes in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and TWO in Wales, there are people seeking asylum or refuge who have to travel long distances to meet this requirement.

They have to come to sign-on as a family. If they arrive early, they will not be allowed in to the building. If they do not come, they will be deemed to have absconded and, therefore, liable to deportation. Doctors' notes - Consultant Surgeons' notes after heart surgery or brain surgery - have been disregarded and a pregnant woman, after saying that she felt too ill to come again, was told that that was her own fault - she shouldn't have got herself pregnant.

During the first lockdown, some mercy was shown and signing-on was suspended but during the second lockdown, when other human beings were told, 'Stay at Home. Save Lives', our brothers and sisters, uniquely, were told to travel to a Home Office Centre, usually on public transport, queue for hours, risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones and sign-on! An exception would be made only if a person seeking asylum or refuge had COVID symptoms. Then they had to steer clear in case they infected others!

It beggars belief!

Working in a very small way at Asylum Link Merseyside, I have met those seeking asylum or refuge and heard their experiences. Most of them are Muslim. A few are Christian. Sorting donated clothes with these wonderful people, I grieve over the sad irony. They are courteous, skilled, generous, kind, funny, helpful, hopeful, grateful and God-fearing. Our population is declining dangerously. We need

more young people and yet look at the decent young people to whom we have offered a Hostile Environment, and are even now trying to drive from our shores.

We have angels in our midst and we don't know it!

Let us open our eyes to see those seeking asylum or refuge as Christ sees them and raise our voices to shame those in power into behaving in a civilised, humane way to those seeking sanctuary.

Sister Ruth Miller
Convent of Notre Dame, Parbold

[Sr Ruth is a long time ALM supporter, volunteer and key organiser of the ALM Shop]

The story of the ALM Shop, St Anne's Centre, Overbury Street, Liverpool

From the beginning of Asylum Link Merseyside in 2001 until 2011, donated clothes and household items were distributed freely. In the course of 2011 the financial situation deteriorated and Ewan Roberts, our Manager, asked us to begin to re-cycle all donations in order to raise money. It soon became clear that many of our donations were too good to send for re-cycling and we began to make a collection of very good items. Over that summer, we had quite a large collection of clothing, household items, handbags, jewellery etc. Having advertised the great event, on Saturday, 1 October 2011, we hired a hall in Aigburth and we filled it with all our items attractively displayed. We raised just over £500.

Over the summer months we had also gathered a number of duvets and pillows. With Ewan's permission, one Wednesday morning in late September previous to our sale in Aigburth, we set the duvets and pillows out in the large room, now the Chas Raws room, and at 12 noon, we had our first sale on our own premises, single duvets: £1 and double: £2. We raised £25 on the first day. The following Wednesday, we put out duvets and with them some duvet covers and pillow cases. This proved popular and on the second week we raised £50.



Left: A mum with a very young customer in arms looking for a bargain.

Week by week the total gradually increased, then one Wednesday we introduced a rail of ladies' clothes and from then on our sales grew amazingly. By the fourth week we raised £85. So popular were the sales that we had to introduce tickets in order to cope with the stampede at 12 noon. In those days, all donations were sorted upstairs in a little room and then had to be carried down every Wednesday morning to be laid out. Fortunately we had two generous volunteers who were seeking asylum, who even carried the rails downstairs, one, a hefty Russian. It was not long before we were asked to open on two days; then gradually this became an everyday event.

Right: Sr Kathleen and Susan one of our volunteers

Over this time until the Pandemic 2020, we had some wonderful volunteers who were seeking asylum- from Uganda, Zimbabwe, the Congo, Pakistan, Burma, Mongolia, Tibet, Iran, South Sudan, and Syria. We went to Manchester to support their Court Hearings and rejoiced when they each in turn received their papers to remain in the UK. We were always so sorry to see them go. Two Finnish students also spent some time with us during their placement at ALM on a European Exchange.



We have enjoyed meeting visitors to our store. One memorable morning a group from Porticus UK (part of the same family organisation that owned the former C&A Modes) visited and were thrilled to see on display some new white C&A gents white shirts, evidently saved for years by an old customer. Although C&A no longer operate in UK, they do have branches over Europe, and the visitor was amazed to see the shirts on display with the C&A German Branch motif! He started taking photographs so he could show his colleagues and family.

Porticus have since become key funders for the work of ALM, and I am convinced that short visit to our shop was a key factor in starting that relationship.

Another morning we had visitors from Lloyds Bank and one of the group almost lost her jacket when it was tidily hung up on a rail for sale.

We have very happy memories of our time at ALM in the clothes department. Not only did we raise money to help the running of ALM but it became a social event for many Asylum Seekers and a source of satisfaction for the Volunteers who gave their time.



Editor's Note:

Sister Ruth along with other sisters from the Notre Dame Order [Sr Sheila, Sr Kathleen Ashurst (Founder Member of ALM), Sr Monica and many others, have given unbelievable and unceasing support over the years to ALM and particularly to the organisation and delivery of the ALM shop. Sr Ruth has kindly sent a few photographs she has kept over the years.

Left to right: Sr Ruth, Sr Monica and Sr Shelagh

Barbara "Babs" Gwynne

[Barbara is a long-time supporter and volunteer at Asylum Link Merseyside]

The clothes store at Asylum Link Merseyside has always been a lifeline for refugees and asylum seekers who need clothes, household goods and other items. Previous to the closure of the centre due to the pandemic it ran a little like a cheap charity shop, staffed by our volunteers who worked hard sorting donations and keeping the flow of items going and giving the service users the dignity of 'shopping'. Since March 2020 it has been closed, however, people still need clothing, children grow, babies are born and donations still come in to us.

Many people have been dispersed to the Merseyside area often staying for months in initial accommodation or hotels. Of course there are also those who were already in our area and used the clothing store as a resource.

People in hostels and hotels usually have limited laundry facilities or changes of clothes often arriving in unseasonal clothing and shoes.

When we receive a request for clothes/shoes we try to ascertain sizes and any particular needs or cultural preferences. We then make up a bundle of clothing, shoes, underwear and other items ready for our volunteer drivers to deliver. It can be a bit of a challenge choosing clothing for other people who you have only spoken to on the phone and who are unfamiliar with UK sizing but most of the time we seem to just about get it right and the clients are very appreciative.



Photo shows Ian and Koorsida Downing sorting out donations

The people of Merseyside continue to donate and we are grateful. We occasionally get brand new clothing and recently received bundles of new clothes from Mandela8 and Merseyside Fire Brigade amongst others.

We have also developed contacts with other organisations, which are covering clients who are at a distance to us. We have built up links with local midwives and other health professionals.

We are happy to take donations of adult and children's clothing and shoes. We have limited space for household items but can take baby items such as good quality working buggies – if they come with instructions and accessories that is a bonus. We seem to have a fairly steady number of pregnant ladies so other baby /maternity items are welcome.

Ewan Roberts

[General Manager of 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 in The ALM Corona Diary January and February the word that emerged top of the list will not come as a complete surprise: **"Hopeful"**.

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. 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.

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? 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, <https://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 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.

ALM Additional Report to SAS for the latest period to March 2021

In terms of destitution during the last quarter, there has been little movement in the sector. We have seen an increase in the numbers of people experiencing violence in their homes for many reasons. Occasionally people still arrive and have to be signposted and we had one instance of attempted suicide where someone was scheduled for a pick up by Serco, which was cancelled at the last moment, leaving them street homeless and utterly devastated. Thankfully the situation was



resolved, but the bureaucracy and picking over of minutiae by the Home Office means you can never be sure someone has been housed until you get a message back from them to confirm it.

As we moved through the spring, our outdoors work has started again, mainly with the Action Asylum Project and visits have recommenced to our allotments, with the bike rides becoming more regular and the start-up of a fledgling cycle club run by ALM Asylum Volunteers.

We had a fantastic [day out in late March](#) with a trip to Ripponden, once again to work with Treesresponsibility, planting up a hillside with saplings. We also took two groups hill walking over the moor and through the valley from Sowerby Bridge, back to the site.

It's a standing joke that when we count up the numbers at the start of a walk – eight bodies – we say we only intend to



bring back five and we all have a chuckle. On this occasion, one participant was so enthusiastic he came off the moor at pace, outstripping the group as we turned and twisted our way down the hillside and it took a good 10 minutes to call him back as our paths diverged.

I often ponder the difficult journeys many people have had to get to this country and whether or not we are over protective in this sort of situation, but better safe than sorry.

One of the highlights of the walk was, when passing a farm, a young Eritrean man stopped in his tracks, closed his eyes and said, 'This smells like my village.' The cattle, feed, grass and general farmyard smells transported him to happier memories and he made a bee line for the cows. It was a wonderful relaxing day and a much needed break from the Asylum System for all of us.

Coming back to the system, there are many proposed changes to the way Asylum works in the UK, almost none of which are any good. These include a two tier process, where only people arriving through resettlement programmes are given Indefinite Leave to Remain. Coming here under your own steam will result in being labelled as 'illegal' with an automatic assumption that you will be returned to 'any third country' at some point.

The use of barracks and camps has been put forward, with no account taken of the self-harm (1 in 4 attempt self-harm) or suicide evidenced through the Australian System, or our own recent experiences with Napier Barracks. The terms used include 'offshore processing' which is language from another era entirely.

Couple this with the imminent ending of the 'Everyone in' COVID policy and the next year is beginning to look very bleak. On the 5th May a hearing will take place to determine whether the Home Office can resume its evictions, which were stopped in September 2020. Nationally we have been quoted a potential figure of four thousand evictions; one thousand section95 and three thousand section4 as they empty out the emergency hotels.

So as we slowly start to resume services at the centre, it is with a sense of determination (and optimism), that we will continue to help in any way we can, but also to make people aware of the coming changes and gather support to contest the hard times ahead.

Faiths4Change

SAS Report February & March 2021

March 2021 Harvest – An abundance of Spring Greens & Kale; Sprouts & Leeks

The SAS grant provides us with a reliable and flexible source of restricted income.

The income means we can pay staff & volunteers' expenses, buy materials, and utilise it as match funding to draw in additional grant income.

During February & March 2021 SAS funds have directly supported

- Roots in the City – Community Garden
- Support Worker salary contribution
- Volunteer expenses & bicycle repair costs (new brakes)
- 40 bags of Peat Free Compost (2000 litres)

Roots in the City Garden



Lockdown restrictions and high levels of COVID-19 infection have meant that only Team members have been active on site until 23rd March.

Despite the chilly temperatures we've been busy in the garden. We've created and actioned an 8 growing bed plan specifically for vegetables for the food bank at St Bride's, we aim to have food available to harvest for 30 weeks this year.

We have lots of lovely veg & flower seeds growing in the polytunnel from Cornflowers to Kale. Growing organically means we rely on encouraging pollinators such as Bees & Hover Flies and natural predators such as

Ladybirds to deal with pests like Aphids. We need flowers to grow alongside the veg. We have 2 natural areas of the garden that we leave completely alone.

We've created a seed bank, topped up with donations from Gary, Kath & Emma to enable us to keep sowing throughout the season. We have 60 + seed potatoes chitting indoors, while outdoors we've topped up the beds with manure and peat free compost, Beetroot, Parsnip & Radish seeds have been sown and the Broad Beans, Onions and Garlic are already thriving and pushing skywards.

Volunteers

Gary has continued to come to the garden most days, feeding the birds, planting, bringing horse manure and making raised beds. Caps returned in mid – March beaming!

'I'm so glad to be here, this garden is my second home and I've missed it so much. Too many people are lonely because they can't meet others, I miss people and the garden.'

Grabbing a cuppa Caps was soon outside clearing ground for composting in preparation for growing Sweetcorn and Squash. His bike brakes were rather worn, new brake blocks and a check over by the local bike mechanic means his bike is fit for the road again.

Caps has also been helping Rachel at another community garden in Liverpool – the La Salle Hotel Kitchen garden. Together they have been preparing some of the 20 new raised and strip beds for planting.

Keeping in Touch

We continued to maintain contact with existing Roots gardeners by phone & email, we also held 2 garden drop ins on zoom (one in February and one in March) which have been really popular – Caps & Carol joined by phone, others via laptops & iPads. Everyone really enjoyed seeing and talking to each other, sharing what they are growing and ideas for the garden.

Our second harvest of 2021 – Greens all the way!

On 11th March we had our second harvest of gorgeous greens weighing in at 3.4kgs for the Micah foodbank which serves mainly Asylum Seekers. Three crates of delicious Spring Greens, the last of our Curly Kale plus Leeks and the last of the Sprouts (see picture above). We're anticipating a bumper harvest or 3 in April as our Purple Sprouting Broccoli is just coming into flower, we have lots of winter salad growing, Chard is flourishing and the Spring Greens are getting chunkier by the day.

New composting friends and partners

The priests at St Vincent's Church and the folk from Greens for Good continue to add to the heap with their veg and organic in-edibles ultimately enabling us to return this resource back to the land as rich soil conditioner / mulch. We have 2 new compost partners who are offering substantial support.

Compost Works have received funding to build community compost facilities in community gardens, providing caddies for residents to collect and transport their in-edibles and training to get the mix right. They are building us a facility in the Roots garden that can take in-edibles from up to 100 local residents! This will give us substantial amounts of homemade compost and soil conditioner over the next few years, reducing our reliance on bagged compost.

Merseyside Recycling & Waste Authority have given us 10 new compost bins to give away to households who want to compost at home, the bin comes complete with a how to guide.

Both partners' support will help us all to reduce the staggering 140,000 tonnes of food waste sent to landfill on Merseyside annually; it contributes significantly to our collective carbon footprint.

Myerscough College

We're pleased to welcome Myerscough Tutor Emma back into the garden to deliver 3 City & Guilds Horticulture courses every week from March 23rd. As it is formal education, rules permit us to offer these much needed opportunities for groups of 6 to socialise, learn and enjoy being outdoors together.

SAS Additional Report April 2021

The Roots in the City Family Gardeners



(L to R: Rachel, Kath, Emma, Donna, Caps, Gary & Annie)

Lockdown restrictions and high levels of COVID-19 infection meant that only paid staff and one volunteer Gary have been active in the garden until 23rd March. Guidance from the Church of England meant that only one person could use the building / garden at a time. We missed being together, Caps, our long term volunteer, was unable to attend.

Keeping in Touch: Social Connection

Donna, our Support Worker kept in weekly contact with Caps and other gardeners, particularly those who lived alone or were shielding again. A phone call from a friend or someone who cares and has time for a conversation makes a big difference when you're isolated and missing being out with others.

Donna & Rachel facilitated 2 garden drop ins on zoom which were really popular – people enjoyed seeing and talking to each other, sharing what they'd been doing and growing. They shared ideas for the Roots garden and have wasted no time now they can attend again.

Humanitarian Assistance: Food

Between January & March we've had 2 harvests, which have been picked up by Martin the Driver and taken to St Bride's for the foodbank. Lots of fresh, delicious winter greens ...Chard, Mustard, Mizuna, Claytonia, Spring Greens, Curly Kale, Leeks, Sprouts and Sprout tops for people using the foodbank to take away.

SAS support has meant funds to support wages - Team members have been able to look after the garden, sow seeds & prepare the soil for future harvests and gather the over winter veg for people attending St Brides foodbank to take away and enjoy.

Wages paid also meant that team members could make calls and send texts to check in with individuals, have time to listen and enjoy each other's company from a distance. Hosting zoom drop ins enabled people to come together and reduce the isolation felt by many, familiar faces on a screen, laughter and sharing ideas for the future - hope. Once back in late March we've used some SAS funding to provide additional support to our long term Volunteer to assist with another community garden and to have much needed repairs done to his bike.

SAS Thank you from us all at Faiths4Change

Alison Moore

[CEO of Refugee Women Connect]

SAS Destitution Fund Report, January - March 2021

This report will cover the total spent on destitution fund from January to March 2021. It will include the total spent per service user on the destitution fund within this time period.

Initials of service user	Reason for application	Dates for fund in this monthly period	Reason for multiple application	Dates for multiple funds received	Total spent for this monthly period.

NW - 2285	Service user has not been able to gather enough evidence to make a fresh claim and there have been delays with her case due to COVID-19 Lockdowns. Still waiting for support with section 4 application. Has been staying with friends as she is homeless, reliant on destitution fund for financial support. Has very complex mental health issues.	12 th January – 13 th March	Delay on section 4 application due to backlog caused by COVID -19. Concerns that if DF is suspended this would further impact mental health, has history of suicidal ideation.		9/10 weeks (Multiple payments given on same day due to COVID-19 Lockdown) Total: £225
MMG - 1995	Case was refused, had no financial support. Solicitors unable to take her case, has fresh evidence which she is waiting to submit herself.	12 th January – 13 th March	Service user is destitute and living in a safe house, depends solely on our support.		9/10 weeks (Multiple payments given on same day due to COVID-19 Lockdown) Total: £225
YS – 4103	Service user was living with a friend who asked her to leave. Whitechapel placed her in a hotel as she was homeless	12 th January – 13 th March	Is still looking for a solicitor as she does not meet the threshold for legal aid.		9/10 weeks (Multiple payments given on same day due to COVID-19 Lockdown) Total: £225
GG - 4107	Case was refused, has no financial support, and is now gathering new evidence to appeal her case. Has very complex mental health issues.	12 th January – 13 th March	Concerns that if DF is suspended this would further impact mental health, has history of suicidal ideation.		9/10 weeks (Multiple payments given on same day due to COVID-19 Lockdown) Total: £225
	Total: £900				

Beginning balance at start of January 2021: £1095

Total received from Churches Together during period: £1350

Total spent during period: £900

Total remaining Destitution fund at end of period: £1545

Mimi Gashi

[Manager of the Destitution Fund at Refugee Women Connect]

Additional Update to April 2021 for the SAS Destitution Fund

Prior to the COVID pandemic destitute funds were directly given to women at our weekly drop in

services. This allowed management to continue assessing individuals needs and any change in their circumstances in order to continue with the support if destitution is identified.



Photo: Comfort Etim and Julia Bayton doing deliveries to Refugee Women Connect clients

With national restrictions put in place as a result of the pandemic alternative arrangements had to be made ensuring service users and staff are kept safe, and money was delivered to those that are in great need of such support. Throughout the lockdown we have provided the women with payments of three weeks in an open place with allocated times so as to minimise the risk of possible infection (RWC COVID rules were followed).

The destitute fund has allowed women to purchase particular foods due to their medical health issues which in turn has helped them cope better with side effects to their medication. It has also given women the freedom to buy their own cultural food such as halal meat, specific fruit and vegetables that are not found in general supermarket stores etc. Some of the women are couch surfing with friends and by having the destitute money allows them to contribute to food and other essentials. The destitute fund acts as support to allow time for individuals to secure legal representation in order to regulate their immigration status.

EMMA Leaper

[Action Asylum Project Lead / Asylum Link Social Worker]

On Sunday 28th March, Action Asylum teamed up with community conservation group 'Treesponsibility' to plant trees! An amazing day was had by all, even the sun was shining!

We all met at Asylum Link at 8:30am, and COVID safety measures began – taking temperatures, asking if anyone had any symptoms, hand sanitiser and ensuring everyone had a mask on... once we knew we were safe and good to go, we all boarded the Maghull Coach – it was a 49 seater, with 24 of us on board – sitting on every other seat to ensure social distancing.

Another 5 cars followed the coach in convoy – bringing the total number of people leaving Liverpool to 38!

I had collected welly boots and rain coats from the donations coming into the Asylum Link centre for a while, but we were short of some good waterproof trousers and some good quality gardening gloves. The SAS funding enabled us to purchase these items and ensured we were well prepared for the elements and the task ahead!



Photo: The Action Asylum tree planting team in Ripponden

The coach travelled one hour to a farm on a hill top in Ripponden, West Yorkshire and once up at the Tree Planting Barn, the volunteers were briefed on the task for the day – planting 300 trees – digging, staking, mulching, all different stages of planting – they gave us demonstrations before splitting us into teams with each team doing a different task (on rotation). It was fascinating,

and everyone got stuck in straight away... I was so impressed with the level of enthusiasm, despite the difficulty of the task (it was quite hard work staking in – heavy tools etc.) – what amazing volunteers!

Around 1pm – we started the lunch rotation (by smaller groups – COVID restrictions); Illa and I had pre-prepared pack lunches for everyone (including the coach driver!) – with 3 options – halal chicken (to accommodate any Muslim volunteers), vegetarian, and vegan options... Every lunch included a tomato cuppa soup – and I brought along plenty of flasks with hot water, as well as tea and coffee – so everyone could get something hot to eat for much needed energy.

After lunch, we got back to the task, and the remaining trees planted in the ground, before heading back to Liverpool on the coach. It truly was a fantastic day out!

Thanks again to SAS and Neil for agreeing to fund us!

Another huge thanks for assisting us on the Complex Needs Team with a Nigerian Family of five who have been struggling to keep up with their heating bills and put food on the table during the past few weeks - your support has gone a long way, and their situation is starting to improve now. Stay safe everyone, Emma

[Editor's Note: Action Asylum have another event coming up - on Monday 17th May -- the plan is to take a group of refugees to Crosby Beach to do a litter pick and then have a picnic.

SAS have offered to fund for litter pickers and gloves for volunteers.]

Seana Roberts

[Manager of Merseyside Refugee Support Network]

Merseyside Refugee Support Network

SAS Fund Report

Sept 20-March 21

CLIENT ID	CLIENT ISSUES	DATE OF START OF SUPPORT	CONTEXT	SUPPORT OFFERED	TOTAL £ SAS SUPPORT GIVEN
AA (Iranian family)	Family reunited – lovely but - causes serious benefits disruption and financial crisis	Sept 20	AA went from being on his own for several years to being reunited with his wife and 2 young children. Any change of circumstances requires updates with the DWP for benefits reassessment. This takes some time and further delayed when a National insurance is required for the spouse.	Various funds used to support family + food and clothes – due to scale of need whilst advocating with DWP for benefits.	£50
MR (Iranian family)	Family reunited – lovely but - causes serious benefits disruption and financial crisis	Sept 20	MR – exactly same situation as AA above	As above	£50
YI (female Iranian)	Secondary breast cancer/needed to find suitable accommodation	Oct 20	YI – is an amazingly strong young woman coping with secondary cancer. On gaining leave	Moral and practical support to contribute to rent deposit to secure suitable ground level access flat to	£250

			to remain her wellbeing was badly affected by the poor quality housing she had been in. Moreover, she would have been housed in a shared HMO had she not sourced her own accommodation.	meet her health needs; help with benefits transition Other support included furniture donations	
MB (Eritrean family)	Client lost job due to COVID and delays in benefits and wife pregnant led to crisis debts and lack of money for food, gas and electricity	Oct 20	Family ended up in crisis and debt due to loss of earnings and delays in processing of benefits.	Emergency payment to help with food and heating etc., as well as helping to address housing debt	£200
OT (Eritrean family)	Another family reunion situation, but still ongoing issues	Dec 20	Home office sent wife and children's BRP to a post office which no longer exists – took 2 months to resolve that matter, which resulted in significant benefit delays.	Via various funds- Emergency support and ongoing advocacy – even now.	£200
SI (male Sudanese)	New refugee with error on ID documents leading to benefits issues	Dec 20	What seemed like a minor error has caused no end of issues for the client – but in run up to Christmas we knew that the delays would be exacerbated.	Via food support and cash support to help bridge gap until benefits paid.	£150
ZS (male Iraqi)	Lost job during COVID	Feb/Mar 21	ZS – had no funds due to loss of income to afford his renewal of his leave to remain. Lost flat/sofa surfing/no entitlement to	Via various funds and support - emergency cash support given and food support. Referred to ALM for help with visa application/renewal	£150

			benefits until visa renewed	and ongoing issues.	
IYI (Sudanese family)	Long term issues on benefits processing	Feb 21	IYI and family have poor literacy and understanding of the processes for benefits and have missed appointments or not understood what they should do, all this has caused background delays	Family in crisis and helped via interpreter caseworker to get matters resolved and to enable the process of benefits to be fully assessed and processed.	£150
SA(male Sudanese)	Long term client who lost job/debt issues	Mar 21	SA has worked for years and then lost his job during COVID. Lack of funds and delays in benefits led to all savings being spent and debt issues mounting up before seeking help. Tried to get new job but this hasn't been possible due to Home Office not returning his paperwork on a different matter for over a year. Ongoing advocacy and support.	Supported with start-up of new benefits claim and evidence of lost job. Help to minimise but manage debt repayments	£170
AS (Pakistan family)	HO delays with ID documents for children Oldest child attending for dialysis 3 per week	Mar 21-ongoing	AS is a single mum – she got signed up for benefits but not receiving any cash for the children due to delays in issuing of children's BRP cards. Mum has to take oldest child to	Cross agency case support. Until HO reinstated cash support for children, Mum has limited funds for food/essential travel. Work ongoing	£150

			Alder Hey 3x pw for dialysis/kidney failure. Makes it difficult to sort out back ground issues and progress financially		
AIA (Pakistan family)	One off emergency support on loss of purse and no cash for food for children	Mar 21	Mum lost her purse no other funds to buy food until payment of benefits 3 days later.	One off cash support offered	£50
SI (female XXXX)	One off emergency payment until reinstatement of benefits	Mar 21	Victim of DV – moved to different location at short notice. Emergency support offered prior to reinstatement of benefits.	One off cash support offered at this time.	£50
TOTAL PAYMENT IN THIS PERIOD	£1620.00				
TOTAL YTD	£3275.00				

Support for SAS/ALM

Finally, and if you are still awake, I have attached a Finance Report and statement of SAS financial activities for the year 2020.

I would like to thank all contributors to this May newsletter which I hope you have found informative and interesting. I would like to thank also again the individuals, faith groups and other organisations for continuing to support the work of SAS and its local partner agencies with donations, fundraising activities, new and old clothes, donating specific food items, etc. You can obtain a full list of food items wanted and fundraising ideas for SAS from the CTMR administration office [sas@ctmr.org.uk or tel: 0151 709 0125] or directly to myself.

[NB please note at present ALM are open to receive physical donations on Wednesday and Thursday between 10 am and 12 noon.]

Cheques should be made payable to “Churches Together in the Merseyside Region S.A.S” or simply “CTMR SAS”.

Donations can alternatively be made directly to:

Churches Together in the Merseyside Region S.A.S
HSBC, 40-29-28
Account 61156144

We can provide a list of other ideas or suggestions for raising funds and supporting the work of SAS. Apologies for the length of this newsletter but I want the reader to appreciate the positive support

work and wellbeing activities that are being provided to arguably the most marginalised group in our community during these most restrictive and frustrating times probably.

The impending lifting of restrictions will on the one hand make service delivery easier. On the other hand there will be a large increase in people requiring help. The Home Office is currently reviewing how early they can start evicting people from hotels and hostels and the potential numbers are in the thousands. The funding for that will only increase substantially.

Your continued support is greatly appreciated. Please keep in your prayers the staff, volunteers and trustees of SAS and our local partner agencies. Additionally remember those colleagues with confirmed COVID symptoms and all people self-isolating and /or working from home.

I hope you have a safe and enjoyable spring and summer.

My best regards as always

Neil

Neil Cunningham

Coordinator, CTMR/SAS Destitution Project

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May 2021

Ps If you prefer **not** to receive SAS newsletters in future please let me know. Neil

SAS Finance Update

Finance

Attached is a summary statement of financial activities for the year to December 2020 with comparative figures for the full year to December 2019. This shows a net surplus of £6,545 and a closing fund of £42,066.

Following a funding review in September 2020 and projection for the following 12 months period, we have reduced the basic total monthly cap for all four of our partner agencies. This results in an overall monthly total outlay on grants of £3,000 until September 2021. However individual ad hoc emergency support grants will always be considered and, if funds allow, will be covered in addition to this cap.

We have also, starting January 2021, arranged for monthly standing order payments to the partner agencies. This will reduce the unnecessary admin involved in preparing cheques, arranging signing and trips to the post office.

It will also help the partner agencies in unnecessary trips to their offices and their banks to present cheques. Most partner offices are closed to the public and staff are working from home.

We will continue to monitor support levels on a regular monthly basis throughout 2021.

Since the last SAS Newsletter sent out in October 2020 we have received grants of:

- £6,000 from the Passionist Order
- £1,700 via the LCVS from the Everyday Changes Fund [incorporating the former Fred Freeman Fund]
- We have also received ad hoc donations from five individuals totalling £750 and
- 35 individual donors continued to support SAS by standing orders.

SAS contributed £46k for accommodation and emergency support grants in 2020. This is broadly in line with the pro-rated level of support provided in 2019 [£53k].

Support grants include both humanitarian aid and wellbeing projects delivered by ALM and other local agencies including RWC [Refugee Women Connect], Merseyside Refugee Network Support [MRSN] and Faiths4Change.

Funding

SAS does not have any outstanding grant applications in place. If any members or supporters have any suggested sources of funding for SAS that would be very welcome.

Properties

Pre COVID there were on average 250+ registered as destitute with ALM of which we are currently only able to provide emergency accommodation for between 15 and 20 people.

We are still supporting 3 properties for emergency accommodation purposes– two former presbyteries with one accommodating destitute women, and the other for men, and one other property for destitute men. Following COVID some people have been moved out without being replaced for health and safety reasons.

Miscellaneous

When restrictions ease, and ALM is able to open its doors again we anticipate there being a flood of newly arrived people seeking asylum who are currently invisible to us. This will have an effect on SAS's ability to provide emergency support grants.

-SAS has had recent referrals from our Baptist colleagues, from the Salvation Army, and also from a refugee Support Group in Cumbria. We have been able to advise and signpost them for further assistance or advice.

Neil Cunningham, May 2021

Support for Asylum Seekers
CTMR – Churches Together in the Merseyside Region
Registered Charity Number 519061

Statement of Financial Activities
for the year to 31 December 2020

	2020	2019
Incoming Resources		
Grants from Organisations	44,625	23,764
Individual Donations	8,066	7,340
	52,691	31,104
Resources Expended		
Accommodation	22,742	16,657
Destitution Support	23,404	36,798
	46,146	53,455
Net Incoming (Outgoing) Resources	6,545	(22,351)
Fund Balances		
At 31 December 2019	35,521	57,872
At 31 December 2020	42,066	35,521
Represented By :		
Bank Bal @ 31 December 2020	42,066	35,521