

Birmingham Schools and Colleges of Sanctuary

Newsletter No. 9 July 2021

Once again our schools have worked hard during Refugee Week, some using this as their first step on the journey towards receiving the School of Sanctuary Award, others building on work which has been ongoing over the whole school year.

When we think back to our last face-to-face networking meeting in February 2020, we remember the enormous energy in the room as we made plans for future activities. It's great to know that this energy hasn't got lost, and while schools have been having to cope with lockdowns, bubbles, new Covid cases in pupils and staff, teachers shielding or on sick leave - many of you have worked hard to continue with the School of Sanctuary work and those who have had to put it on hold for a while, are already thinking about next year.

One recurring theme is involvement in social activism, reflecting the passion for justice amongst staff and pupils, and determination to make a difference.

St Francis RC Primary and Abbey RC Primary have both recently received the award, and we look forward to others following in their footsteps soon - as well as those schools whose award is due to be renewed. Fircroft College has also had its award ceremony, and the fact that we now have TWO Colleges of Sanctuary in our network is reflected in the change in the title of our newsletter!

What is also exciting is that we have expanded the Schools Team and some of us have managed to visit schools over the last few weeks.

With many thanks to all the wonderful staff in schools who are working so hard and deserve a good rest over the summer,

Best wishes from

Barbara, Cath, Debbie, Denise, Emily and (our newest recruit) Andrew

First of all we would like to share with you some campaigning work from St Dunstan's RC Primary School in King's Heath, where they are keen for the pupils to become social activists from an early age!

At St Dunstan's, Assistant Head Vanessa Baker has taken on the lead role in the School of Sanctuary work (with the valuable support of Head Teacher Matthew Tehan who, seven years ago, led St Chad's RC Primary in Newtown to become our first Birmingham School of Sanctuary!).

Vanessa writes:

Shortly before Easter, Dr Trewby from Columbans UK and Stephanie from Stories of Hope and Home came to visit our Year 6's with two asylum seekers, who shared their stories and experiences with our children. Our children were horrified to hear some of their experiences and to find out that when they arrive in the UK they cannot work. We were informed of a national campaign #LiftTheBan that we could support in order to advocate for the rights of asylum seekers.

We got on it straight away, our children wrote letters to their local councillors, Mike Leddy and Lisa Trickett, and invited them to come in and speak to the pupils about this issue. We shared our journey on



Twitter and the response has been phenomenal, so much so that Lisa and Mike came in to answer their questions. We were delighted to welcome them in and were incredibly proud of

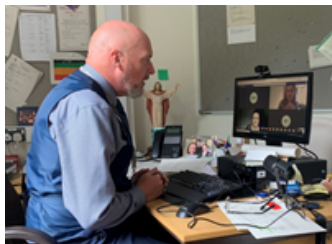


the mature (and sometimes very challenging questions) they asked of these two councillors, determined to hold them to account. We were pleased to hear that they (representing Birmingham City Council) supported us and wanted to work with us to push this forward. So now, our Y6's are working on publishing their letters for our local councillors to hand to our MP Steve McCabe, who will raise our concerns and hand our letters to Boris Johnson - the children were very excited by this. They have felt empowered by the impact they have had, even if on

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a small scale, but are so proud of themselves, viewing themselves as ambassadors for change!

Two of our children, as a result of their activism, were invited to be Key Speakers at a recent meeting of Birmingham Migration Forum, run by the City Council,



reading their letters to the members taking part in the forum - both being rewarded with a rapturous round of applause! Here you can see Mr Tehan introducing the children to the Migration Forum, and one of the pupils



reading out her letter.

Across the rest of our school, this Refugee Week, we have been immersing ourselves in the ethos of #WeStandTogetherWithRefugees #WhoWeAre #TogetherWeStand, taking part in an array of activities to promote this amongst our school community.

Abbey RC Primary School has recently received the School of Sanctuary award under the able leadership of Rebecca Lonergan, who reports here on their wide range of activities including writing to the Home Secretary and the local MP, and taking part in a sponsored walk representing the distance from Calais to Erdington.

The children took part in a range of activities to link Refugee Week with the forthcoming 'Walk with Amal', to raise awareness and money, and to deepen the children's understanding of the issues. The overarching theme for our week was 'Welcome the Stranger'. This week coincided with our school 'Parish Week' where we focus on what it means for our children to be part of a wider community, and the roles and responsibilities that come with that.

We have also linked the week to the theme of vocations. For us it is really important that our children value the role of 'service to others' and are encouraged to be active participants in society, as social activists and to give a voice to the marginalised.

One of our parents came to this country as a refugee 13 years ago, and he shared his story along with a friend of his who is now head of faculty at a local school.

Additionally, some classes created artwork linked to the 36,000 humans project, which we feel is really important - our children appreciate that these statistics are people with hopes, dreams and valuable lives, and it is an outrage that people are having to risk their lives to seek refuge.



Our Chaplaincy Team had a fabulous session with Steph and Temitayo from Stories of Hope and Home. This team of children all then shared this with their classes and children have created orange hearts that we shall be sending to our Home Secretary, telling her #WhoWeAre and asking her to #LiftTheBan. The children thought really deeply about their values, and how the current legislation does not reflect this!

Children created orange hearts (symbol of the new coalition "Together With Refugees", see below) that we sent to our local MP, telling them 'who we are' and asking that they put pressure on the Government to rethink their stance on the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.



Each class has been learning about the 'Walk With Amal' journey. Following this, every class has taken part in a sponsored walk around our school/church grounds. We have collectively covered the distance from Calais to Erdington, to give the children a sense of a journey that they can relate to. We asked for

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Sponsorship, in aid of Refugee Action, and have raised just short of £300. The children also made banners displaying the theme of 'Welcome' and 'Walk with me' that they carried as they walked.

Our week concluded with each class taking part a prayer service exploring the themes of the week and allowing children time to reflect on all they have learned.



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City of Sanctuary is one of the founding members of the newly created coalition



TOGETHER WITH REFUGEES

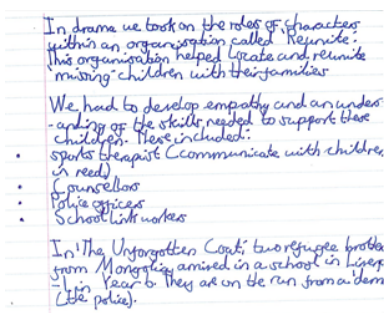
<https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/>

Cromwell Primary School received the Sanctuary Award in June 2019 and, as Head Teacher Rubina Darr tells us, is still committed to this work:



We have been discussing in our assemblies Migrant crossings and newspaper articles relating to Refugee accounts of how and why people seek asylum. We have been thinking about why we are a school of Sanctuary, what this means, and how we can best support refugees. Classes took part in activities to increase understanding

and empathy and Year 6 also worked on drama based on the book "The Unforgotten Coat".





Year 2 produced beautiful images of “The Empathy Tree”.

We have also heard Sabir, CEO of the Refugee Council in Scotland, who travelled to the UK himself as a refugee, speaking of his experience in his early days. As well as fund-raising activities, we have explored what Activism looks like, not just raising money but peaceful protest and writing to MPs.

Holy Cross Primary School in Walmley: Katrina Crowley, Vice-Principal, reports:

What a fantastic week at Holy Cross Catholic Primary School celebrating Refugee Week 2021! We really focused on the theme 'We cannot walk alone'. We started off the week by holding a virtual whole school assembly, sharing what it means to be a refugee and giving examples of celebrities and their stories; we all committed to work hard during the week to improve our understanding of what it means to be a refugee. The Rights Respecting Representatives and Mini Vinnies encouraged children to collect donations of children's clothing for St Chad's Sanctuary (with whom we work regularly). We collected over 50 bags of clothing which is amazing!

Different year groups took part in different learning projects throughout the week e.g. The Giant Doll's House Project, used the pixar film 'Wind' to infer meaning about escaping another life, attended a Zoom session with Sita Bracmachari and Jane Ray who have collaborated to produce a new book - Swallow's Kiss - which then the children took inspiration



from and created their own illustrations for the book, created playscripts and wrote prayers for refugees and asylum seekers.



Early Years focused on learning all about Paddington Bear and the story of his journey. Additionally, all classes took part in a two-hour music workshop run by music teachers from Services for Music where we learnt about music from around the world to learn to appreciate all the different God-given talents we can offer.

We will continue to ensure that our school is a place of welcome for all children and their families and continue to commit to supporting those who are vulnerable; just like Jesus would do.

St Peters RC Primary School in Bartley Green has recently joined our network; they invited us to their post-Refugee Week Assembly, where each class told us what we had done - and very impressive it was too! School of Sanctuary coordinator Laura McDonagh sent us this report.



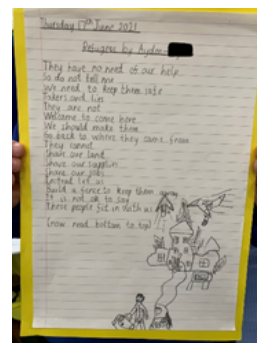
In Year 1, the children learned about how some refugees have to leave their old lives behind at just a moment's notice. To reinforce this idea, the children created 'grab bags' with things they would take with them if they had to leave home in a hurry.

Year 2 looked at the story of Paddington Bear and found out that Paddington is like a refugee because he was displaced because of a natural disaster (an earthquake) which destroyed his family's livelihood. During outdoor learning, Year 3 imagined they were refugees and built shelters using resources they had to hand. Year 4 researched refugee stories from the Save



The Children and Action Aid websites. They selected refugee stories that had resonated with them and made shoeboxes to reflect their refugee journeys.

Year 5 began Refugee Week by reading *The Boy at the Back of the Class* – a book about a boy called Ahmet who had to flee his home because of war. They learned about different views and opinions about refugees and debated about which were right and wrong. They then read 'Refugees' by Brian Bilston. When they first read the poem, the children were shocked. It was full of negative and very controversial opinions about refugees. They then read it again from bottom to top and heard a completely different viewpoint about refugees – one that they all agreed with. Year 5 then created their own poems written in the same style.



Year 6 read Hamam's Story about a ten-year-old boy from Iraq on the Action Aid website. They read about his journey to Greece and the dangers he faced along the way. They found his story so interesting and moving that they wanted to gain a better perspective of what his journey was truly like. They researched his story further and wanted to write their own version based on the facts they could find online.



Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary can now be found on Twitter: @BrumSchOfSanc

Anna O'Driscoll, who is the lay chaplain at St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School, reports:

We are launching Schools of Sanctuary formally in September but all pupils received an assembly this week for Refugee Week. Our young Vincentian Year 7 group also met and looked at how the Beatitudes are relevant when welcoming refugees to our country. They each chose one of the Beatitudes and stuck them onto a heart. This is displayed on our chaplaincy board in the centre of our school. We hope to do more next year and the children can educate each other.



Our sixth formers also went to Sophia House, a place for refugee women when they arrive in Birmingham. Five students went and did gardening at the house to make it beautiful for the ladies who live there. This was organised by our parish priest and lay chaplain.

Washwood Heath Academy, where the work is coordinated by Aggie Doyle, received the award in October 2019.



The whole-school assemblies focused on Refugee Week and there were discussions in form time, using a wide range of resources. We also recorded a podcast with our refugee and migrant pupils

about their experiences in the UK.

The students commented that some of the films were eye-opening, as they didn't realise how difficult it must be for people to flee home, and they also reflected on what they would take if they were forced to leave home.



This year's Poetry Workshops

Once again we were fortunate in being able to offer poetry workshops to several schools. Some of these were in person, but most were online.

At St Francis RC Primary in Handsworth, Thyssen Lewis reported that



some of Year 5s and Year 6s had the opportunity to work with the talented Poet Vanwy Arif, who shared her own poems and encouraged the children that they also have the ability to be poets in their own right. Looking at the topic of Refugees and challenging negative perceptions, the children



at St Francis' Catholic Primary School were inspired to write their own poems relating to Refugee Week which they thoroughly enjoyed.

Abbey RC Primary School in Erdington also had a face-to-face poetry session

We had a fantastic visit from Vanwy Arif, a local poet, who led a session with children as part of a competition. Children from across KS2 wrote some really thought provoking and compassionate poems.

Other schools which took part were Cockshut Hill, Washwood Heath, Oasis Foundry, Oasis Woodview, Shaw Hill - a total of 460 children! Our visiting poet commented that all the children, in every school, had been well-prepared about the subject matter, and that the schools were all well-organised and welcoming. In each school we awarded prizes for the most effective poems and will be looking at the poems again for the inter-schools competition over the summer.

Our Colleges of Sanctuary

Our network includes not only schools, but also colleges. Kelly Forrester from Halesowen College tells us about some of their Refugee Week activities.

As part of our ongoing commitment to being a College of Sanctuary, we at Halesowen College promote inclusivity through our tutorial programme. All students have allotted time with their personal tutor group, and this is the perfect time to bring up important topics and issues which they may not be exposed to in their standard timetabled lessons.

For Refugee Week a presentation was sent out to all students via their personal tutor addressing why we celebrate Refugee Week, the differences between a refugee, an immigrant and an asylum seeker, and some first person stories from those who have had to leave their countries for a variety of reasons.

College Impact

One of our ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) groups have shared what would help them whilst at College.

Language
Consider students whose first language is not English when making posters and signs.
Overly wordy resources can take time for students to translate and to understand.

Patience
Be patient when interacting with others who are learning English.
They may be slow to reply as they are trying to translate and understand what you are saying.
They are not being rude. Please speak slowly.

Photos from a previous College event marking Refugee Week, showing where some of our students have travelled from using paper chairs to show individual journeys.

Halesowen College

Students on our ESOL programme (English for Speakers of Other Languages) happily got involved in the creation of this tutorial presentation. They discussed during class time what others around college could do to be more inclusive. This included ensuring that posters and promotional materials are written with them in mind, keeping language simple for

those who are learning English. Similarly, when addressing others verbally, to be mindful of those for whom English isn't their first language and are translating what is being said. Speaking slowly and allowing processing time can make a great deal of difference.

Fircroft College held its Award Ceremony with contributions from the students, including a poem, music, and delicious refreshments.



Working with sanctuary seekers in new communities in Birmingham and the West Midlands is nothing new to Fircroft, an adult education college that embraces diversity and an ethos of social justice. In recent years, Fircroft has worked extensively with refugees and those seeking settled status in their “Free Thinking” course, which increases confidence, improves language and maths skills and teaches employability law. The college has also delivers extensive ESOL courses to those seeking sanctuary and provided online ESOL courses throughout COVID-19.

Mel Lenehan, Fircroft’s Principal and CEO, said “It is a great honour to receive College of Sanctuary status, which demonstrates our commitment to people from all parts of the community. Everyone has the right to live a life free from fear, prejudice and persecution, and Fircroft is a place that gives its students confidence and skills that enable them to move forward in life.”

Yasir Wahbi, Treasurer to Birmingham City of Sanctuary, was pleased to hand over the award and said “Listening to the students’ lived experience and how passionately they feel about their time at the college, this is what College of Sanctuary is all about. It is a pleasure to recognise Fircroft as a College of Sanctuary and we are looking forward to hearing news of their projects and work with new communities in the future.”