



STANDING ALONGSIDE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DONCASTER

A view from the edge

Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

06 September 2018

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Volunteers and refugees

By Paul FitzPatrick

So much has been happening during the summer at DCC, it is difficult to keep a record of everything. The trip to Bridlington was our largest-ever outing. Such visits are generally valued as an opportunity to relax, to have a change of scene, to take part in new experiences – or if not new, ones which have been missed for many years. These also generate a pause in the enforced waiting which characterises the lives of asylum seekers and which seems like a cruel and inhumane punishment. Indeed, according to Government statistics, there were 22,676 cases pending initial decision at the end of the second quarter of 2018, of which 47% (10,707) were more than 6 months old. This compares to 24,593 cases pending initial decision at the end of Q1 2018, of which 40% (9,824) were more than 6 months old.

These outings also express a hospitality of laughter and smiles – learning to canoe or to play football on the beach or to make butter in the Minster is a great leveller. At their best, they provide an opportunity to act ‘with’ rather than ‘for’. And that, it seems to me, is the great challenge. Against the background of a hostile environment, it is easy to be pushed into the position of providing services, a kind of politics of pity and compassion. But can we also forge, somehow, an alternative to the dualism of ‘helper’ and ‘helped’? Is it possible to imagine relationships differently, to imagine politics differently? This is a continuing challenge.



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A visit to Bridlington

On the last day of July, we enjoyed our largest ever outing – a total of 127 people travelled to Bridlington in two coach loads to spend a sunny day at the seaside. It was a great day.



The participants reflected something of DCC's diversity.

Country	Number
Afghanistan	1
Albania	8
Algeria	2
Cameroon	1
China	9
DRC	1
Eritrea	1
India	4
Iraq	3
Iran	16
Lebanon	7
Malawi	6
Morocco	1
Palestine	1
Sudan	15
Syria	38
UK	11
Zimbabwe	1
Total	127

Some comments from those who were there

Yes we are really happy. The kid is enjoyed with play the sand. They are happy to see the sea. Because this is the first time come to the seaside.

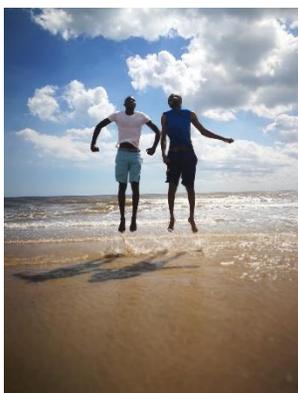
Today I'm very enjoyed and I have lovely day and my family with me. My wife and my children very happy.

I was enjoying in beach because I met my friend from my country and other country and take with them nice time and I want tell you something I know you know that but I want tell you, you is best meeting house. Thank you very much.

I like about today everything because I liked going in the sea and I liked playing in the sand. But I didn't like going in the coach because it made me feel sick.

I am enjoyed so much and nice day really nice day. I think not I alone enjoy, everyone here enjoy with very nice day today. And I thanks team House so much about today. Nothing bad. Everything good. Thanks you team about journey. Nice day.

It was really good day because we like the beach and there was no problems.



We enjoyed going into water. I've made sand castles. Playing balls. The coach was comfortable. We had enough food for the kids.

It was a lovely day. We enjoyed the sea view and the water was cold but we swim for half hour and then we enjoyed playing. It was very nice. Was best day since I come UK. Thanks

Today is very nice for me because I saw the sea, and I enjoyed with everything there. Thank you for

everything. I enjoyed with my friends in this trip.



We've really enjoyed the day very much. It's been good to see our children enjoying the swimming and playing in the sea. Thank you very much to everyone has made this day possible.

I'm very enjoying today for anything and also for food and weather is very nice today and enjoying with my friends and family with everything. Thank you for this ideas. Thank you for food and for everything we doing there. I hope to come again. Thank you everybody.

The day was very nice. I spend my time with friends. No problem happen during the day.

I had fun. I enjoy every bit of it and I had good time.

How wonderful to have sunshine but even if it had been dull the brightness of everyone's smiles would have made it a joyous occasion. The talent on the football pitch was a sight to behold. The day went all too quickly, thanks to all who gave their time and energy to arrange it. Just seeing everyone relaxed was wonderful.



Canoeing at Barnby Dun

Special thanks to Sharman and Kevin Jones, and to the Kool Kayakers of Barnby Dun. The former lent their house for a barbeque, the latter enabled activities on the water, in what has become an annual fixture: canoeing followed by barbeque. And final thanks to the team of Syrian barbequers!

The participants can be thus summarised:

Afghanistan	1
Algeria	1
Albania	2
Brazil	1
Cameroon	1
China	1
DRC	1
Ethiopia	8
Kuwait	4
Iraq	5
Iran	3
Morocco	1
Saudi	1
Somalia	1
Stateless	1
Sudan	11
Syria	3
Zimbabwe	1
Total AS/R	47
Syrian BBQ team Including baby of 3 weeks	11
KKCC on the water team	9
KKCC off the water team	4
Our hosts	2
DCC volunteers	12
Grand total	85
Children under 15y – but only 2 of these on the water aged 10y and 12y	5



It was my first time in a canoe and it was amazing! The place is very beautiful and quiet. The food was delicious. Thank you for this day!

Today was really brilliant and interesting. I enjoyed. I ride boat. I eaten kebab. Thank you to all.

Enjoyed the new area, seeing the river because most of the time we are in the town centre. Like the change. I am so happy about boats – everything.

I enjoyed so much. We had a good time because everyone was happy. I thought everyone ride boat. They made for us kebab. It was a very good time for me.



I enjoyed the outing from the beginning. The walk with all the flowers fruits to take from the trees, the river experience with the kayak, the barbeque which was very delicious.

Yeah. I'm very happy and enjoy in this days in kayaks with canoe club. Thanks so much for Conversation Club in Doncaster. I'm very happy in

Syrian BBQ. Thanks for all people is make me very happy. I'm changed the stress for today.

It was a really good day. Met new people. The host she is nice friendly lady. It's a pleasure to enjoy in amazing friendly atmosphere in the end of summer. Thank you very much to everyone contributed to make this happening.



FORTHCOMING DATES

05 September Literacy Project at the Minster restarts 1.00pm

07 September 8.30pm outside CAST. Arka present a Polish theatre spectacular, with stunning staging, including flame-lit structures which move through the audience, and a giant winged ship.

13-14 September at CAST: *Where we live*: exploring the significance of place and belonging for migrants

22 September DCC Trip to Lincoln

25 September NACCOM Annual Conference, Birmingham Pathways out of Destitution

27 September 10 Questions about the Middle East: Guided conversation with Simon Mabon: Minster 18.00

Eating freshly made bread with butter which the class made themselves

– just another day at the History and English classes at Doncaster Minster during August

The usual Wednesday sessions of the English Literacy Project at Doncaster Minster took a break in August and instead... we had History and English classes which as always were very well attended. The youngest member of the group was 2 and I think the oldest is 'in his 60's'! The sessions were attended by children, parents, grandparents, husbands and wives and single people and there was a good, positive learning atmosphere. The sessions were devised and delivered in partnership with DMBC Heritage Services and DMBC Adult Family and Community Learning department and took place in the Minster itself.



The groups learned about a different topic each week including Roman Doncaster – particularly the site which the Minster is built on – the Vikings, and significant women in Doncaster through time. Victoria

Ryves from Heritage Services brought objects from the museum collections to see and handle... a Roman soldier's uniform, shield and sword, a Viking drinking cup, implements for making butter and last but not least a special 'custard jug' from the Victorian period when custard was a rare and unusual treat. One week the group learned how to make butter! Cue lots of laughing as everyone was given a glass jar and lid and told to shake the jar until it became butter! Then it was time for a break and some Kurdish bread straight from the oven with freshly class-made butter!

These classes have to be devised to have something to offer learners at different levels and the group included learners with high levels of English fluency – many of whom assist others with translation and contextualising the sessions – as well as those who are beginners and everyone in between. It's not a certificated class: the intention is to get people to feel confident learning together, chatting along the way and making and maintaining friendships with others. It is as much a social group as it is a learning group and feedback indicates that this makes learning more interesting for the participants.

Hannah Kirkham and James Sandford from Adult, Family and Community Learning brought their expertise in making family learning fun and in one session in particular Hannah brought digital photos of how Doncaster town centre used to look to see if people could recognise the

places. One of the learners suggested that another time we could as a group go around the town centre as 'tourists' and catalogue what the town centre looks like now..... we must do this!



Doncaster Minster English Literacy Project takes place every Wednesday 1-2.45ish in St George House (next to the Minster) and in the Minster itself underneath the tower. It is FREE to attend and people of all faiths or no faith are welcome to join us. For more information or to refer someone to the project please contact the Minster office on 01302 323 748 or office@doncasterminster.org.uk



Remembering Aylan Kurdi

By Louise O'Brien

A couple of days ago marked 3 years since toddler Aylan Kurdi's body washed up on a beach in the Mediterranean Sea. As I and millions of others watched this news from the comfort of our homes, I couldn't have known how he would change my life forever. Less than a month after that, I travelled with a friend to Kos, Greece to see what we could do to help, if anything. Doing nothing just didn't seem like an option.

I've struggled to put down in words how the experience of going to Greece as a volunteer has affected me. Mostly I've given up trying because it doesn't really work. But a couple of weeks ago, standing talking to a colleague at DCC I found that I was telling them quite clearly about the actual moment when things changed. It was a moment of clarity, of why I felt I was there at all.

It was the middle of the night and the weather was still warm. Those days, refugees were literally sleeping in the streets, under bridges and on the port itself and there were families and individuals arriving several times a day. It hadn't rained for a long time, but there was a massive storm on its way and we (me and other volunteers) were trying to get people to move themselves and what little they had away from the port to avoid the worst of it. We were taking them up to a massive hotel in the town to rooms which were being paid for by donors from all over the world. But here's the thing. Randomly approaching people and saying you've got to move because you're going to get washed away doesn't always work when you don't speak the same language. How do you explain this to a family which

is fearful anyway? Somehow we managed to persuade most people to move off the port and to come with us – a huge leap of trust and faith – to accommodation that they knew nothing of and didn't understand had already been paid for. We walked up and down with families and individuals throughout the night in the pitch dark and got most of them to shelter just in time. My moment of clarity came when walking with an extended family of Afghans. Using mime and bloody mindedness I got them – all 15 of them – to walk with me through the dark carrying their remaining possessions with the Grandfather close to my side. All the way he held out his hands offering prayers and supplications (duas) to God for their safety 'Ya Allah, Ya Allah, Bismillah Alrahman araheem.....' looking at me occasionally and smiling kindly. And that was the moment of clarity. I thought 'this, this wish for freedom and peace is something I am prepared to risk my life for'. Just like that.

RIP Aylan Kurdi and all the thousands of migrants who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean and elsewhere searching for peace and freedom. Your love for life is infectious, my thanks to you are endless.

A visit to Lifewise

By Maureen Mallinson

Lifewise is an interactive centre run by South Yorkshire Police where community groups can learn about such issues as health and safety within the home, first aid, different forms of abuse and emergency contacts. On my previous two visits, I handed out food and drink to refugees and asylum seekers, and bagged rubbish, in between joining in any group. I have always found what

Lifewise is about to be pertinent and relevant.

This time we were organized into groups, and I heard my name called out to take group 3! I'd never had a group before, even if it was only three people, but everyone in the group participated and we all had a good laugh. Everyone found the discussions very informative, including things like what number to call in an emergency.

As on previous occasions, the visit culminated in the opportunity for anyone to dress up in the different police uniforms while Lifewise tried to recruit them!

Swimming at the Dome



A group of 40 went to the Dome on 14 August for a 'family swimming' session. There were 10 families from 5 different countries including Algeria, Albania, China, Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan. There were 20 children - ranging in age from 16 years to 4 months. We had 5 volunteers - two of these were teenagers from the canoe club Kool Kayakers. As always, the event was fun for everyone - and some coaching in swimming was provided for older children and interested parents. The highlight of the event was when the teenager with a disability managed to come down the steep straight slide - to cheers from everyone!

Football with FURD



It was a good day.

Players from DCC United, with two superfans, joined 8 other teams at the Umix Centre in Sheffield for the annual All Nations football festival. This is an annual five-a-side football tournament organised by FURD, Football Unites, Racism Divides.

There was impressive football, halal kebabs, sharing our food and cheer. Thank you, FURD, for the opportunity. Here's to next time. And the final?!

Yes, it was a good day



Brief news headlines

1. Delays in Home Office decisions

Of the decisions the Home Office made in 2017, 18,189 or 75% were taken within six months of application, 2,832 took between six months and a year, 3,059 between one and three years, and 243 between three and five years.

Of the 40 people who waited more than five years to receive an answer, seven were granted asylum or another protection visa, 22 were refused and 11 either withdrew their application, left the country, or died while waiting for a decision. They came from a range of countries, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Somalia and Yemen.

Source: *The Guardian* 17 Aug 2018

2. Asylum Accommodation: Yorkshire Councils Speak Out

Local Authority leaders from Yorkshire and Humberside wrote a joint letter to Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, warning that the current procurement process for the new asylum accommodation contracts risks 'catastrophic failure' after it was revealed over the summer that there were no successful bids for the contract in Yorkshire, as well as in the North East and Northern Ireland. New bidders are now being sought for the 10-year contract, leading to fears that local authorities may have to accept higher numbers of asylum seekers and poorer quality accommodation so the Government can persuade a company to run the scheme.

The council leaders also say they are being increasingly side-lined and that many towns and cities across the North each have more asylum seekers 'clustered in a handful of wards than entire regions in the South and East of the country'. Further reports of asylum accommodation standards have also been in the news with a focus of filthy conditions in a property in Birmingham, which is managed by G4S.

Source: Asylum Matters

3. The *Independent's* Happy List

The Independent has published its 10th annual Happy List, naming 50 outstanding people whose volunteering, caring, fundraising, mentoring, charity work or selflessness make Britain a happier place to live. The list, in partnership with JustGiving, highlights people who deserve to be celebrated for their kindness, courage and selflessness.

Despite arriving in the UK without being able to speak any English, Yaqoob Adam quickly became fluent and joined the Red Cross as an orientation and interpreter volunteer, inspiring the local community in Rotherham to follow his example, always giving 100 per cent and most recently creating a football team. 'Yaqoob is an inspiring person who brings the best of himself against any challenges that he comes across in his life' said his nominee.



Yaqoob is well known to many Sudanese in Doncaster.

Source: *The Independent* 28 August

Befriending, support and professional boundaries

By Nic Burne

It is acknowledged by all that to different degrees asylum seekers are vulnerable people. It is not so well realised that, as volunteers, we are vulnerable too. We would not volunteer if we were not compassionate, caring and wanting to help. I would like to share some of my thoughts, previous training and experience on the matter of boundaries but also, as a trustee of DCC, I feel I and the trustees have a responsibility to our volunteers as well as our service users to raise these issues.

These notes are my own views except where quoted and in italics. They are prompted by recent DCC activity and are by no means a

criticism of some very fine and generous deeds. My comments are open to discussion and can be accepted or rejected as you, the volunteer, feel right.

I want to highlight the difference between befriending and support and the importance of setting boundaries. Boundaries can either be “professional” – how much you are able to help an individual with any of their problems, or “personal” – how much of yourself you are prepared to give to others. For want of a better word I use the term “professional” boundaries to cover all aspects of the service we can offer to service users even though we are not professionals.

An awareness of boundaries can be beneficial for:-

- Maintaining morale.
- Maintaining personal safety.
- Preventing overworked volunteers.
- Safeguarding issues.
- Legal liability. (We are not allowed to give asylum advice)
- Compassion fatigue and burnout.
- Maintaining realistic service user expectations.

I am attached to the Bradford McKenzie Friends, a group of volunteers who support failed asylum seekers. They have boundaries very clearly stated in their training and documentation. These are to protect service users as well as volunteers. To quote (and adapt) ...

Do:

- *Be friendly but not friends.*
- *Learn to say no.*
- *Enable clients to make decisions for themselves – it is important they feel independent and in control of their lives. Don't tell them what to do.*

- *Be clear about what you can and cannot do for them from the outset.*
- *Work in pairs.*
- *Meet in a neutral place, not homes.*

Don't:

- *Give personal information/news, although many MF volunteers do choose to give their mobile numbers to arrange meetings etc.*
- *Don't promise something you cannot deliver. (Or promise that someone else will deliver for you!)*
- *Visit clients at home.*
- *Accept or give gifts – items or money (leads to heightened expectations / a bond)*
- *Meet a client outside of your volunteering role.*
- *Do favours or tasks for clients when you shouldn't be / don't want to be.*

To reinforce this message here are some quotes from the Red Cross training notes...

- *Employees and Volunteers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.*
- *When you receive a referral never give your personal telephone number or mobile to a client. When calling a client volunteers are advised to dial 141 to ensure the telephone number cannot be traced.*
- *Visiting clients at their home should be avoided and only to be done under special circumstances, for example, if the client is physically disabled.*
- *Staff and volunteers MUST always carry out visits in pairs...*

A further safety procedure suggested by one of the trustees is that volunteers meeting someone on

their own should leave a note with at least one person of where they're going and who they are meeting.

All the above are sensible and justifiable precautions. There is no DCC policy insisting they are followed but you need to be aware of them and set your own boundaries.

It is impossible to set limits for “personal” boundaries as the situation for each volunteer is different. The best advice if you want to move beyond the “professional” boundaries is to think through the issues ahead of time and decide how far you want to go. Here are some ideas to think about...

- Do you want service users to have your phone number or address?
- Do you want to be available 24/7?
- Do you want to visit them at home or have them visit you and, if so, what precautions will you take?
- How much of your life do you want to share with them?
- How much can you financially commit to them?
- Have you considered how in debt to you the service user will feel and how you and they will manage that?
- How will you manage their natural desire to thank you for helping them by asking you for a meal? Do you have the time and how will you manage a repeat invitation?
- If you do something for one how will you manage the same request from another without appearing to have favourites?
- Are you prepared to transport asylum seekers in your car? Insurance? Alone?
- How will your actions reflect on other volunteers?

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!

A view from the edge Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

Based at the
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To receive a copy of this newsletter by email, send a message to Paulfitzp@aol.com

Please send your contributions and suggestions to the same address.

Doncaster Conversation Club offers opportunities for local people and people who have sought asylum in the UK to join together to share friendship, while offering support and practical help.

The Club seeks to create a relaxed, friendly and supportive environment, and works on the principles of

Ownership – *everyone can get involved*

Impartiality – *it is not affiliated to any political or religious body*

Confidentiality – *what you say is private*

Respect – *for each other's differences and individuality.*

The Club is pleased to acknowledge the support of **Doncaster Society of Friends (Quakers), The Red Cross, The Refugee Council, Migrant Help, The Foyle Foundation, DIAL Doncaster, South Yorkshire Community Foundation, The Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group, St Leger Homes, Club Doncaster Foundation, M25, Riverside Housing, DARTS, CAST, Fareshare, The Ruth Hayman Trust and Doncaster Minster.**

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The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors.

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