



*A view from
the edge*

Doncaster
Conversation
Club
Newsletter

04 June 2020

STANDING ALONGSIDE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DONCASTER

IN THIS ISSUE

No, the lockdown isn't over

By Julia Burne

A text message to me on June 2nd - 'The quarantine is over. I want to go and visit my friends in other cities and see the UK. It's boring here in Doncaster'.

I just wish it was this simple. I can quite see that, as an asylum seeker in Doncaster, the lockdown can't have been much fun.

The government have only relaxed the rules a little. Yes, groups of less than 6 people can gather outdoors. But travel by bus or train is regarded as risky because of the increased chance of picking up coronavirus. Visiting people in their homes - and certainly staying overnight - is not allowed.

The government website is very helpful <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>.

The added difficulty for asylum seekers is that they fall into the category of BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic). This group have been shown, if infected, to be more likely to die from it. The reasons for this are not entirely clear and probably a mixture of economic, social and health-related factors. Until the reasons are clearer, targeted prevention is difficult.

My best advice at present is - to wear a face mask when in enclosed public indoor spaces (shops, public transport), to eat a healthy diet including plenty of fruit and vegetables (not easy on £37.75 per week) and to exercise. Also, sunbathe when possible to boost your Vitamin D levels - Vitamin D has a role in boosting immunity.



A quiet Copley Road
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Let's do it for Doncaster
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Thinking about the future of DCC

By Jan Foster

Little did I think when we were forced to close the doors at DCC on March 16th, that almost 3 months later we would still be closed. Restrictions are being lifted slowly, but what does this mean for DCC? Over the years we have built up DCC into a thriving place to be, to the envy of many within the voluntary sector.

Our strap line is **standing alongside refugees and asylum seekers**. Our aim has always been to make asylum seekers dispersed to Doncaster (they have no choice in where they are sent) welcome, part of an extended family.

We not only provide essential services such as advice (not immigration) and signposting re their asylum related issues, form filling and telephone calls. Advice, signposting on health matters. ESOL classes etc. We also have a community café providing not only refreshments but a chance to chat, meet friends, make new friends. We are befrienders, in other words, we are about making everyone feel part of our family/community. A feeling of **belonging** is so important after months of travelling (in often perilous conditions) to reach safety and belong!

And so what of the future?

Some universities have already announced that the next academic year will be online. Others will operate mainly online but with limited face to face meetings.

Anyone visiting DCC in the past would have looked in on our ESOL class and observed 20-30 people huddled round a table in deep animated conversation. This cannot be replicated **virtually**.

Again we come back to the word **belong**. The people huddled round the table belong there. It is part of their shared learning.

If we look at our small office, it is not unusual to see upwards of 9 people there. 3 volunteers, 3 seeking advice and 3 interpreters. Not to mention anyone coming in to use the printer. Following social distancing rules, we could just about manage 3 occupants.

Changes will have to be made. Over the coming weeks/months the trustees will be looking carefully at how the situation can be managed. We may have to look at an appointment only system.

What is for certain is that DCC will not be able to return in its current format for quite some time.

My fear is that due to social distancing measures our service users will only be able to access DCC for urgent needs only. There will be no space for socialising. We could become like any other **official body**.

DCC has prided itself in not being like that, but by going the extra mile and being a supportive community, thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers, we have excelled and put Doncaster Conversation Club well and truly on the map.

Let us hope that like the government we can do a U turn and not have to enforce the extreme measures I have

just mentioned. And also (unlike Boris) I can say **sorry I got it wrong**.

Over the rainbow

By Zarish Nadeem



While I was looking for a knitting or crochet project for lockdown time, once on my walk in the neighbourhood I have seen a crochet rainbow on a window, and there you go, I have found what to do.

I shuffle through my knitting wool, collected the wool I need to crochet a rainbow. Then I watched some YouTube videos of crochet rainbow pattern, write it down, and started crocheting my rainbow. I have put in my window, given one to a friend, and made 2 more for friends who work in NHS.

I have learned something new full of positivity and hope for future when all this lockdown will be over and we'll have a normal life back.

Let's do it for Doncaster

Most of Doncaster town centre is still not open and we continue to ask people not to visit unless it's absolutely necessary to do so.



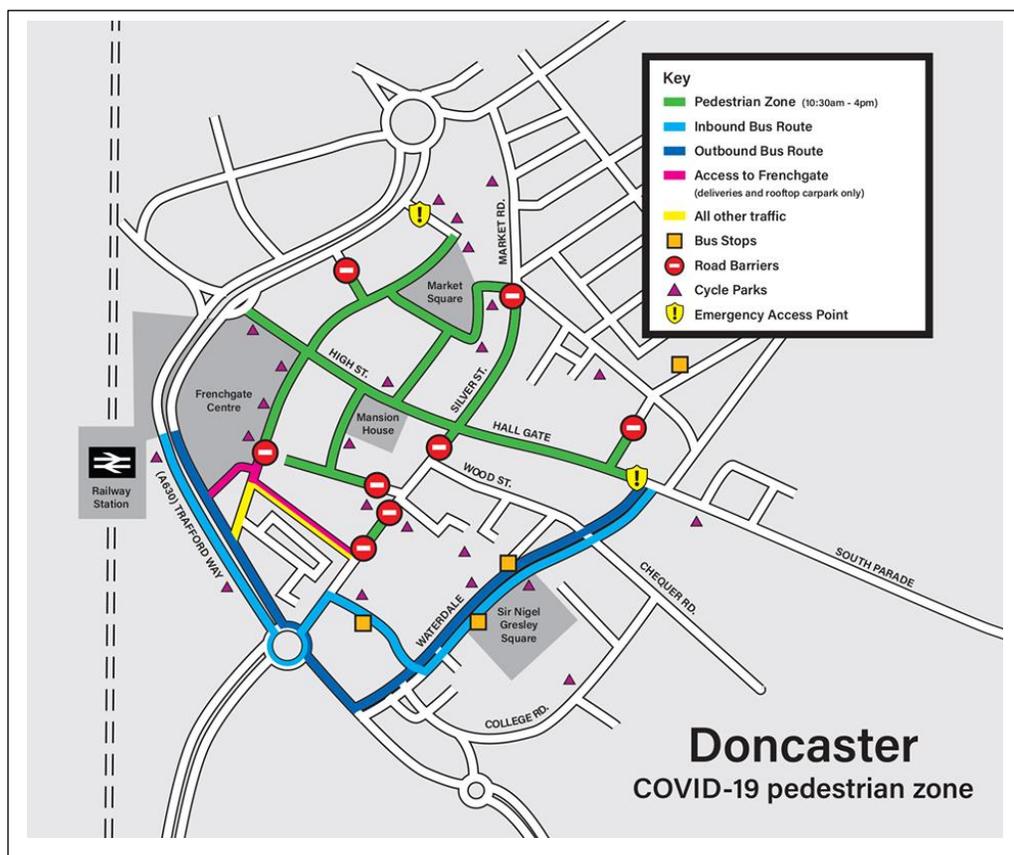
The Government announced that it hoped to ease the lockdown restrictions in the coming weeks and months and to make sure we are prepared for this, we are introducing a number of changes in the town centre.

These changes will help people follow guidance on social distancing and other public safety measures.

Lots of signage will be going up to highlight important safety messages like social distancing. We plan to create pedestrian routes by asking people to use the left hand side of the busy streets and the main parts of the town centre will become pedestrian friendly with traffic restrictions in place. We will also have town centre ambassadors out and about to help and advise people.

These changes will start happening shortly ready for when we can encourage you back into the town centre.

For the time being and for the safety of you and others, please don't go into the town centre unless it's essential.



Protecting yourself and others

By Dr Rupert Suckling [Director of Public Health, Doncaster]

It is good to see that we are now able to make small steps to ease the lockdown and that some shops, such as outdoor markets are allowed to open from 1st June. We are now able to meet in groups of up to six people from different households outdoors, including our gardens, but it is still important that we keep 2 metres apart from other people.

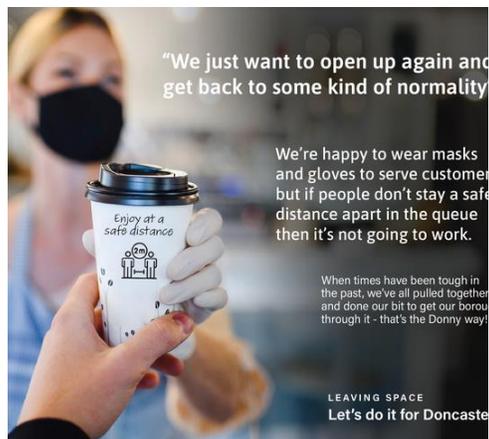
The NHS Test and Trace service has also started this week. This means that anyone with symptoms of Coronavirus can be tested to find out if they have it.

You must self-isolate and stay in your home if the NHS Test and Trace service tells you to. You can find out more about this service, including how they keep your information safe by going to the website:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>

Although some things are changing and we will start to see some shops opening and more people outside, it is still very important that we look after everybody by following the guidelines. One of the best ways to do this is to wash our hands often. It is very important to wash our hands when we leave the house and when we come back home. Remember to keep 2 metres apart from other people. This can help save lives.

Thank you for everything you have done so far to follow the guidelines and keep everyone safe. Let's keep going. We can do this!



Find local groups and support here:

<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/health-wellbeing/list-of-groups-offering-support-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

You can find information and advice about Coronavirus, including transport, schools and council services on the Doncaster Council webpage. There is a translate button at the top of the page: <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/health-wellbeing/coronavirus-covid-19>

We also have information in other languages here:

<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/health-wellbeing/coronavirus-covid-19>

How you can help

Let us know about your experience of Coronavirus by visiting Doncaster Talks and filling out our survey:

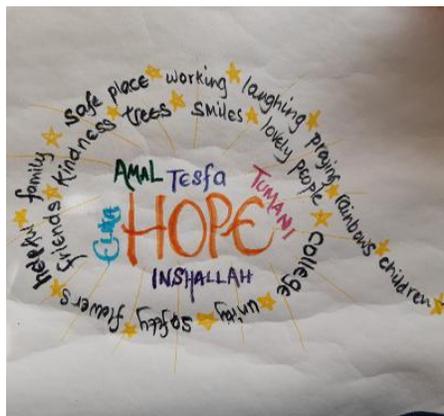
<https://www.doncastertalks.com/>

Opportunities for reflecting on the Lockdown

An invitation to all our readers.

Please think about making a contribution to any of the projects mentioned below. It's great that a range of organisations and individual artists are reaching out to all who are involved in any way with DCC to share their reactions to the experience of living under Lockdown, an experience which may be more familiar to those seeking asylum than to those of us who are sedentary.

Any contributions – no matter how short – can be emailed to Paulfitzp@aol.com



1. Refugee Week

15-21st June will be Refugee Week. Heritage Doncaster and Doncaster Conversation Club usually celebrate with a party, exhibitions, ESOL classes but this year we are taking things online. Heritage Doncaster (Doncaster Museum) would love to share your creativity and experiences during this week.

What we are asking for: To celebrate Refugee Week 2020 Heritage Doncaster would like to share any of the following in order to mark the event and document experiences during this time. The submissions will be added to an online exhibition on the Heritage Doncaster website and shared on our social media (Facebook and Twitter). We welcome submissions from DCC volunteers and from asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants.

- **Tell a joke.** Humour can help us get through difficult times. Do you have a joke or something that made you smile to share?
- **Sing a song.** Do you like to sing? Do you have a song to share?
- **Something else creative?** Do you write poetry? Make music? Make incredible food? We'd love to see!
- **What would you put in a museum?** Do you have a treasured possession or object that is really important to you? We would love to see photographs of these are create a virtual museum of your objects. If you don't have the object anymore, perhaps you could describe it.
- **A message and record of your experience.** What would you like to say to Doncaster during this strange time? What have your experiences of the lockdown been?

How to get involved:

- Send photographs of your poems, artwork, food, treasured possessions or of your experiences of lockdown. You don't have to include your face in the photographs, and be mindful that these images will be used online. Photographs can be taken on a smartphone.
- If you have written a poem, send this as an email or text. You may also wish to write down your message or your experiences of lockdown.
- Record a video of yourself telling a joke, sharing a message, a song or a poem. You can record these on a smart phone. You don't have to include your face in the video, be mindful that these videos will be shared online so only share what you are comfortable with

2. Wayne Sables

Our project is about looking at the positive aspects of lockdown. The aim is people will interview people they've been locked down with via their mobile device or, if they have the kit, a microphone (although not essential). It's a sort of 'in conversation' style audio piece. They then send the voice recordings to us via a google drive link or WeTransfer. They will then be edited into a radio broadcast/podcast.

Here is the google drive link to send the audio
<https://forms.gle/pJSsmbceaycmvWY77>

Alternatively you can WeTransfer me if that's easier
quarantinecreates20@gmail.com

I've done a few starter questions to get the conversation started:

What have been the positive things about lockdown?
What have you noticed?

What have you learned to appreciate during lockdown?

What new relationships have been formed, or strengthened?

What do you love about your community?

What has inspired you?

Test and trace scam

You may get a call from the genuine NHS Test and Trace number 0300 013 5000 but how do you know it is genuine?

Scammers are able to make their calls appear to come from any number.

Scammers may say you have to pay for a home Covid test.

Scammers may say "You know you must not give out your bank details and we are not asking for them. Go to this link and to fill details of who you have been in contact with." It may look genuine but it is a fishing link.

Scammers may ask you to download something to send data to the NHS.

Once they are in your computer you are in trouble.

If you do not feel comfortable talking on the phone, or suspect the call to be a scam, you can ask for an email or a text that will invite you to use the Test and Trace web site instead.

From this you should be directed only to this web address: contact-tracing.phe.gov.uk



CAST: Online Resources

<https://www.publicactsdoncaster.com/>

Since September, CAST and the National Theatre have been delivering the Public Acts project in partnership with Conversation Club who have had weekly creative workshops. A microsite has been launched with creative activities targeted at the participants/ organisations that have taken part in the project. Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, the weekly workshop programme and production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle have been postponed. However, the website is still worth visiting!

[National Theatre at Home](#)

The National Theatre are streaming their fantastic theatre productions straight to your lounge. Once a week a new production is streamed. The Donmar Warehouse production of *Coriolanus*, featuring Tom Hiddleston in the title role of Shakespeare's searing and political revenge tragedy. Streams from Thursday 4 June at 7pm.

[National Theatre podcast](#)

Enjoy the National Theatre's collection of over 100 talks with leading actors, playwrights and directors.

[Home Skool Beatboxing With Shlomo](#)

HOMESKOOL BEATBOX ADVENTURES is a weekly livestreamed interactive show empowering kids and their families to find their true voices and create their own music. For 30 minutes every Thursday, families around the

world will learn new vocal skills from SK Shlomo, the critically acclaimed world-champion beatboxer who has previously collaborated with Bjork, Ed Sheeran and Lily Allen, played at Glastonbury and broken world records with his jaw-dropping vocal gymnastics.

Delicious Doncaster



Doncaster Council's Events Team will bring you Delicious Doncaster 2020 from 5-7 June

The popular annual event has gone online so you can enjoy heaven from a plate from home and get involved too!

City of Sanctuary Sheffield: Homeschool Support Project

Many people in the local community have rallied round in all sorts of ways during this corona virus crisis. For example, locals - and good hearted people from wider afield - have donated generously to the City of Sanctuary project to enable children in asylum seeking families to be included, connected and supported during the Covid-19 pandemic; the idea was to make it possible for them do the work set by teachers

during these difficult days - and beyond.

The Homeschool Support Project is providing laptops, data, telephone IT support, as well as additional homeschooling materials, to families seeking sanctuary. So far, these are the outcomes:

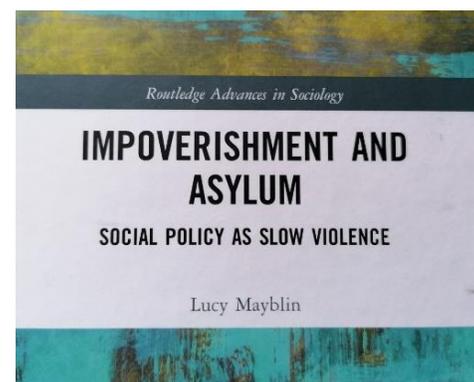
- 80 laptops delivered supporting 192 children
- 240 months of data provided
- 100s of additional homeschool support materials delivered ('goody bags' of readers, non-fiction books, exam text books, pens, colouring books etc - all from local donations)
- ALL asylum seeking families with school age children in Sheffield and Doncaster supported

The work's not over. City of Sanctuary will continue to support families with data provision (asylum houses have no wifi access) and other educational materials, as well as carrying on essential work to meet the wider needs of people who are trying to begin their lives afresh here.

A **huge thank you** to everyone who helped and please continue to support City of Sanctuary and the rights of people seeking asylum.



Impoverishment and Asylum: Social Policy as Slow Violence (Routledge, 2020) By Lucy Mayblin
Reviewed by Lisa Matthews [Co-ordinator at Right to Remain]



The focus of Mayblin's book is the systematic impoverishment of people seeking asylum in the UK, and she approaches the topic through the lens of "slow violence". This concept, developed by Rob Nixon in the context of environmentalism, describes violence that may be invisible, taking place behind closed doors, dispersed, slow to become apparent (in contrast to the immediate and often visceral violence of, for example, detention and deportation).

The book looks at how people seeking asylum lost access to the right to work and mainstream benefits in the early 2000s because of social policy shaped by an obsession with (unproven) economic "pull factors", and a racial turn in how people seeking asylum are perceived. Mayblin points out that there was little concern for the motivation (economic, political) for the movement of refugees during the Cold War. But in 1990s and 2000s there was clearly anxiety about the "dark-skinned" people seeking sanctuary in the UK, who were

racialised as unbelonging and undeserving.

An important aspect of this analysis is Mayblin's situating of the policy within a "colonial present", in which colonial histories can (to use Ann Stoler's phrase) "yield new damages and renewed disparities".

Immigration control can be seen as a form of the "regional containment" described by E. Tendayi Achiume – keeping out those deemed unmodern and backward, people from countries occupied by Europe, positioned by colonial logic as representing Europe's "opposite", its "past".

Mayblin also adopts Achille Mbembe's useful framework of "necropolitics" – individuals targeted by the sovereign power because their existence is seen as detrimental to the wider population. Rather than active killing as punishment, necropolitics (a development of Foucault's biopolitics where the state works to enable life) is about letting people die. Applied to the state and people seeking asylum, this can be seen as the state fulfilling their legal obligations to an absolute minimum by providing minimal support – people being "kept alive but in a state of injury". The deprivation of the right to work also creates a relationship of dependency on the state, facilitating monitoring and control.

The book considers the production of slow violence by the state, and how this is possible because of dehumanisation of people seeking asylum, mobilising a "moral distance" that is akin to colonial imaginaries. Mayblin then looks at the civil society organisations ameliorating social violence through

provision of humanitarian assistance, at a cost of at least £33.4 million a year. She also nods to the tension created when NGOs fill the survival gap created by social policy – providing often vital support, but at the same potentially maintaining the status quo.

Then the book, to this non-academic reader, really comes alive in the chapter that focuses on the experience of slow violence: poverty in the asylum process due to unbearably low levels of asylum financial support. There's a great subsection on the interview methodology and the harm reduction method utilised in the research process.

This chapter (co-produced with Mustafa Wake, Mohsen Kazemi and a researcher who chose not to be named) uncovers the internalised shame and sense of worthlessness many interviewees felt as a result of deliberate impoverishment by the state. People felt shock at what their everyday lives had become and grief for their previous everyday normality.

One interviewee said: "I feel like I am inferior to people. You feel like you don't even look good enough like normal people. You can't even able to buy and wear clothes with this money. It is ruining my life, has put black points in my life, and really hurts my feelings so much."

Another used the striking phrase, "I feel I am embargoing myself".

People spoke of the social death experienced as a result of the policy of enforced destitution. They felt deprived of identity due to the lack of food, with its social and cultural meaning: "I feel I am not Kuwaiti as

having Kuwaiti food is becoming a dream".

The chapter also shares (time-consuming and knowledge-dependent) consumer survival strategies as a form of resistance: maybe going to three different supermarkets to get the best price, maybe pooling resources to do shared, cheaper meals. The desire to maintain one's physical appearance is also cited as a method of active resistance to the dehumanising loss of control over body, health and appearance to the state.

I would personally have liked to see more weaving of the theoretical concepts (necropolitics, the colonial present etc) into the chapters on producing, ameliorating and experiencing social violence but for the last chapter in particular, I sensed that Mayblin didn't want analysis to speak over the direct testimony. But even for someone who is (indirectly) very familiar with the subject matter of impoverishment in the asylum process, the analysis added to my understanding and the interview excerpts were extremely powerful. I will certainly be taking a look at Mayblin's previous book *Asylum after Empire* for more historicising of the current system.



Town Fields: empty during lockdown

A view from the edge Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

Based at the

Quaker Meeting House

Off St James St

Doncaster DN1 3RH

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.

DCC is pleased to acknowledge the support of **Doncaster Society of Friends (Quakers), The Red Cross, The Refugee Council, Migrant Help, DIAL Doncaster, The Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group, St Leger Homes, Club Doncaster Foundation, Ongo M25 Services, YMCA, DARTS, CAST, Fareshare, The Brelms Trust, The Ruth Hayman Trust and Doncaster Minster.**

The Doncaster Conversation Club is run entirely by volunteers with the support of occasional grants for specific activities, currently from the Allen Lane Foundation, and the Wharfedale Trust

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

Paul FitzPatrick

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Doncaster, South Yorkshire

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