



# A view from the edge

## Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

01 July 2021

STANDING ALONGSIDE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DONCASTER

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***They are our neighbours***  
(Kenmure Street, Glasgow, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2021)

By Denise Cann



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**LIVES SAFELY & LEGALLY**  
NEW PLAN FOR IMMIGRATION

The #NewPlanForImmigration, which enters Parliament next month, will allow the UK to support those in genuine need of protection. A fairer system that provides safe haven via safe and legal routes.  
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## Football welcomes

By Paul FitzPatrick



It wasn't quite Refugee Week, but, hey, every week is Refugee Week! And dates have to fit with other commitments.

The Football Welcomes project at Club Doncaster Foundation, sponsored by Amnesty, hosted an eleven-a-side match between DCC United and Fit Rovers, Club Doncaster Foundation's pioneering adult fitness course based at the Keepmoat Stadium, aimed at men over the age of 30, and offered free of charge.

The match took place on Tuesday 8 June. It was a lovely summer evening, perfect for a game of football.

The two sides presented quite startling physical contrasts. Fit Rovers may be older and a bit slower, but certainly not lacking in skill, and had a particularly adept goalkeeper who produced a series of excellent saves. He was kept busy.

DCC provided twenty players, an excellent turnout. Everyone wanted to play! Elisha drilled the team effectively and managed

substitutions expertly. Despite a certain level of inexperience, the team ran strongly and kept focussed, even though the waywardness of the shooting in front of goal left much to be desired. They still managed to win 4 – 1, as their opponents tired in the second half.

Huge thanks to Club Doncaster for organising the event, to the staff who turn out twice a week to support asylum and refugee footballers, to Fit Rovers for daring to engage with a younger and faster team, and to all the players who turned up, including those who came to watch.



Occasions like these provide an opportunity to reflect on themes of belonging and integration. Sport, and especially football, is often recommended for the positive effects it has for people who have been dislocated. Chris Stone of FURD in Sheffield has identified a set of factors which nurture a strong sense of belonging. These include a welcoming environment, organisational support, organic group development based upon informal and democratic decision-making within the group, a focus on playing football for the sake of it, and an implicit knowledge that others are, have been or possibly will be

facing similar problems with regard to their situation. He also observed that the features of their asylum situation were not explicitly discussed at football – the focus was simply on the game itself.

I would say that these features are present when we meet to play football. They are backed up in interviews and film from the match which Club Doncaster have posted on Facebook, available at

<https://fb.watch/67nHdDndNt/>

Through football, some individuals are making links with people in Doncaster who have nothing to do with DCC. It seems evident that sport has the potential for crossing cultural boundaries, even if there is still more to do in raising awareness among other players of the lives of people seeking asylum who are now in Doncaster.



Chris Stone (2017): 'Utopian community football? Sport, hope and belongingness in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers' in *Leisure Studies*

## Open Letter to the Home Secretary on Aspen cards

DCC is among more than 50 refugee and migrant organisations, lawyers and academics across Scotland, Wales and England, who have signed an open letter to the Home Secretary Priti Patel to raise questions about the continuing Aspen card crisis and the suitability of the new provider, the card contractor PrePaid Financial Services.

The letter was co-ordinated by Positive Action on Housing in Glasgow, who gathered information on difficulties experienced across the whole of the UK.

Thousands of asylum seekers were left without money for food after the failed introduction of new pre-paid cash cards by the **Home Office's** contractor PrePaid Financial Services, after it took over from **Sodexo**.

The changeover was supposed to happen over the weekend of May 21-24. Almost three weeks on, whole families are being left without money despite assurances of Emergency Crisis Payments.

Refugee and migrant organisations including **Positive Action in Housing** and **Scottish Refugee Council** say they have been plunged into a full-scale crisis trying to keep up with one emergency after another.

The Home Office had sought to minimise the crisis, giving the impression that the Aspen card

crisis is a four-day glitch affecting a small number of people.

On Monday 7 June 2021, permanent secretary Matthew Rycroft MP told the Public Accounts Committee: “There was an error on the card that did last for a short period of time, like for instance, a weekend but that has now been resolved.”

This comment seems far from being the case.

The letter poses further questions to the Home Secretary.

How many asylum seekers across the UK were affected?

Will those adversely affected by the changeover will automatically receive back payments?

What assurances can you offer that asylum seekers will not be questioned about, or have allowances deducted, for receiving small emergency payments or food supplies from NGOs?

What piloting of the new system was undertaken by the Home Office prior to its introduction?

What due diligence checks were undertaken on Prepaid Financial Services (the new provider) before they were awarded the contract?



## Statistics on asylum for Refugee Week

Gathered by Free Movement from Government figures

### 1. Top five countries of origin

In 2020, almost 30,000 people applied for asylum in the UK (not including dependent family members). This is well below the level in 2019, despite the well-documented increase in the number of people arriving across the Channel by boat.

A good chunk — 46% — were from five countries: Iran, Albania, Eritrea, Iraq, Sudan. Other significant “countries of origin” include Afghanistan, Vietnam, Pakistan and Syria. Some shifts can be dramatic: in 2013, Sri Lanka was in the top five, but now ranks 20th.

The list of nationalities actually granted refugee status can look very different. Only a handful of Indians are successful in claiming asylum, for example, at least before appeal. By contrast, most Eritreans and Syrians are granted asylum.



## A walk by the River Don

By Ayşe Ususloy

Each soul sometimes looks for a station for a journey in order to make the soul refresh and relax. However, can everybody find a right station on the right time for resting? When my soul experienced the destroy of hurricane in my body last week, I was invited for walking via the Quaker House. I thought this invitation was a right step in order to take some air of freedom.



In our group, there are many types of flowers owing to different cultures in the head of Julia. That day I thought Julia was like a gardener, whistling us to give strength and hope concerning the future being probably good. While I was walking in an amazing natural place, having each tone of green colour, this place was like a hospital for me to get rid of the burden of life. Each person found their own medicine in that natural place. While some people found their own medicine by listening to the chirping of blackbirds, others

chit-chat each other. While watching the nature, our youngest friend, the dog of Nic and Julia, must have found relax inside the river. When it was in the river, it is worth being seen. Nic tried to take it out from the river.



As we walked, we had an opportunity to know each other better. I felt so happy that day because everybody behaved me as if they had known me for a long time. I think this is the need of very asylum seeker.

### 2. Refugees resettled

All the discussion so far has been of asylum seekers who made their own way to the UK and were granted (or refused) refugee status. But some refugees are brought directly into the UK. This is known as resettlement. The Home Office's contribution to Refugee Week has been to emphasize that resettlement is good and coming to the UK under your own steam ("jumping the queue") is bad.

The reality is that such programmes, which have been on hiatus throughout the pandemic, do not represent a "queue" which asylum seekers considering a journey to the

UK ought simply to join and wait their turn. Over the past five years, the UK has resettled around 26,000 refugees, including 20,000 Syrians. (This looks impressive by European standards but most EU countries receive far higher numbers of in-country asylum seekers.) The United Nations estimates that there are 26 million refugees around the world.

Refugees hoping to be resettled also cannot apply directly for resettlement in the UK. The UN Refugee Agency in Iraq, for example, is up front about this ("refugees cannot apply for resettlement"). Instead they must hope to one day be pulled out of the pile of registered refugees, like The Claw scooping up the baby aliens in Toy Story, and assigned to a resettlement programme (not in a country of their choice). There is, in other words, no queue to join.

The UK's main resettlement programme over the past few years has targeted Syrians living in camps in the region. David Cameron promised to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrians between 2015 and 2020, a target reflected in the nationality breakdown of refugee resettlement shown identified above. That target was met in early 2021.

To mark Refugee Week in 2019, the Home Secretary announced a new resettlement programme bringing in about 5,000 people a year. It has not yet materialised, and hardly any refugees have been resettled since the pandemic began.

## The Tale of Wild Heather: a Cabaret

A community initiative  
produced by CAST



In March last year, members of Doncaster's local community were busy in workshops preparing for their opening performances of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at Cast over the August Bank Holiday weekend. However, like most things COVID has put that on hold. Despite the pausing of the production, work has continued over the last year with creative activities delivered remotely, including the creation of the podcast **Stories To Get Us Through** and online musical in partnership with *The Guardian*.

This August Bank Holiday weekend, the Doncaster community will perform a new, immersive show at Cast, **The Tale of Wild Heather: A Cabaret** with audiences invited to share a celebratory feast on Cast's main stage whilst being engaged in a forgotten Doncastrian myth. Written by **Jasmin Mandi-Ghomi**, directed by Associate Director, Public Acts **James Blakey** and designed by **Hannah Sibai**, the story is co-created by the community company and features performances from local artists.

Having been postponed last year, Cast will be hosting the third Public Acts production in August 2022, **The Doncastrian Chalk Circle**, a newly adapted version of **Bertolt Brecht's** classic play by **Chris Bush**, directed by Associate Director, Public Acts **James Blakey**, with music by **Ruth Chan** and design by **Hannah Sibai**. Featuring 80 performers from our community partners **b:friend, Doncaster Conversation Club, Edlington Community Organisation (ECO), darts and Cast Young Company**, joined by a company of professional actors and musicians and cameo appearances from local actors and musicians and cameo appearances from local performance groups, this new version is an adventurous tale of belonging, full of passion, spectacle and plenty of Yorkshire grit and humour.

Deborah Rees (Director of Cast) said:

*"The continuation of these projects shows just how important the arts are to our local community, now more than ever. We are striving to connect with community groups across Doncaster for The Tale of Wild Heather: A Cabaret and look forward to developing these relationships as we work towards an epic production of The Doncastrian Chalk Circle next summer. We are delighted that we can create and celebrate together this summer after what has been such a difficult year for so many."*

James Blakey, Associate Director, Public Acts said:

*"Our Doncaster community has remained connected, supportive, creative and hopeful during the last 15 months; working and creating together at distance and learning*

*new skills in order to do so. We're thrilled that this summer we'll have the opportunity to bring our company together for a celebratory cabaret and storytelling performance on Cast's main stage and we look forward with renewed energy to our 2022 production of The Doncastrian Chalk Circle."*

Members of DCC are invited to join the performance of *The Tale of Wild Heather*.

Performances are scheduled for 28th August at 6pm and 29th August at 2pm and again at 6pm.

Rehearsals start on Monday 12th July, and will continue every Monday from 5 - 7pm, and every Saturday from 10am – 1pm.

### 3. Total asylum applications

There are more than twice as many refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the European Union, according to the World Bank; about as many in the world's least developed countries as in the OECD club of rich nations. The UK's share of the world's refugees is particularly light, partly because of its geographic location. The World Bank puts the number of refugees in the UK in 2018 at around 127,000, or 0.5% of the world's refugees.

Even by UK standards, the number of asylum seekers today is not particularly high. Numbers peaked around the turn of the century — over 100,000 in 2002, if dependents were included — and have been fairly steady in recent years. The average over the past five years has been 39,000, well under half the average for the peak years around the year 2000.



## Less reported news

### 1. Home Office plans

The United Kingdom is planning to introduce legislation that would enable authorities to send asylum seekers abroad for processing in an Australian-style offshore centre, according to media reports.

*The Times* newspaper reported on 21 June that Home Secretary Priti Patel has opened talks with Denmark over sharing a processing centre in Africa as part of the plan.

The reported proposal, which has been condemned by rights groups and opposition politicians, is expected to be put before Parliament next week as part of the Conservative government's Nationality and Borders Bill, which comes as the UK moves to overhaul its asylum laws.

Earlier in June, Danish legislators approved a law allowing the Nordic country to deport asylum seekers to countries outside Europe, defying calls not to do so from NGOs and the United Nations.

If the UK measures go ahead, it would mark the first time the country creates an offshore immigration processing centre for asylum seekers.

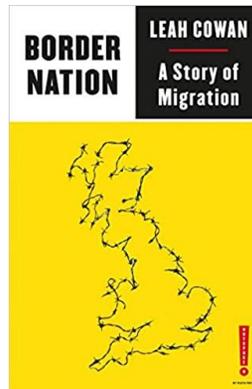
An unnamed UK government source told *The Times* that officials had held discussions with Danish counterparts on Copenhagen's domestic asylum laws and negotiations with third countries over the possible creation of offshore processing centres. The source said talks on the "potential" to share a processing centre abroad had also taken place, with Copenhagen reportedly eyeing Rwanda as a possible host nation for such a facility.

Home Office personnel have also reportedly examined Australia's asylum system. There, all asylum

seekers who arrive by sea are banned from entering and are instead sent to offshore centres in neighbouring countries such as Papua New Guinea.

Source: *Al Jazeera* 28 June 2021

## Book Review



### Border Nation: A Story of Migration

By Leah Cowan

Pluto Press 2021

ISBN: 978-0745341071

By Lisa Matthews [Right to Remain]

*"If you have never felt the surveilling eye and iron fist of borders, it does not mean borders are not violent weapons; it means that your privilege enables you to circumnavigate the gleaming edge of their blade."*

Leah Cowan's *Border Nation* is a short, sharp, incisive analysis of the colonial origins of borders, the violence of immigration control and the profit motive driving so much of immigration policy and practice. Britain is, Cowan argues, a "border nation". That is "a place defined as much by who is kept out as who and what is allowed in".

There are quotable lines on every page of this short book, which

manages to dig deep into the issues and link up weighty ideas while still being very accessible.

Those who have followed the author's work at gal-dem will be familiar with the exceptionally high standard of her writing.

Her one sentence encapsulation of the Hostile Environment is stunning: "It is a living and breathing ecosystem which pulls together the most violent agents of the state, such as the police and border force, and pours profit into private industries which benefit from curtailing the flourishing of our communities and the movement of people."

The short intervention on the problem of "migrants contribute" as a riposte to anti-migrant politics is particularly refreshing. Cowan describes this line of argument as a "house built on sand" that only seems appealing because of "how far the foundational myth of meritocracy is deeply embedded in the British psyche".

In these bleak times, there is also a hopeful chapter on the Borderlands of Resistance, outlining how those directly affected by borders and racism are fighting – and have always fought – back.

The book ends with a helpful set of responses to those familiar objections we hear when we advocate for a world without borders.

This book is a vital tool at a time when liberatory politics is given very little room to breathe. Get it, read it, gift it to everyone you know!

# 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](mailto: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, 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

Picture credits: Hayder al Jayyash

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

**Paul FitzPatrick**

Doncaster Conversation Club  
Doncaster, South Yorkshire

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