

Introduction

A common assumption is that the centre closed so staff will have time on their hands. This is not the case. In October 411 services were delivered and these break down as follows:

- 253 individuals collected food and 77 families received home delivery
- 21 received digital support
- 18 women and four men received telephone support
- 22 women received one-to-one emotional support, and
- 15 received other services

Remote support for families with children falls into the following categories: education 18, social isolation 16, emotional support 7, medical support 2, a total of 43 contacts by Ryn, who works 16 hours a week, and Jackie eight hours each.

Children's Support Service

'I can't communicate with many people. It's really important to socialise - physical not social distancing - with you. I am improving and recovering.'

Before the second lockdown, Jackie and Gill introduced parents and their children to a nearby park. While the children fed the ducks, played on the swings, ran around, kicking leaves, hugging trees or looking for fairies under a carved wood mushroom, their parents experienced the relief of someone to talk to about anything and everything while sharing their children's fun. Having little English is not proving an insuperable. Google Translate, mime and drawing pictures help!



After a walk, a woman commented that she tested her blood sugar and it was improved. Another said that she often sat in a dark bedroom for hours and getting out for a walk made a real difference. Jigsaws have proved a solace and to have a calming effect as well as alleviating the empty hours. Another said that being outside in the company of another took her mind off a breast cancer diagnosis.

Story Quest, where children follow a storybook tale as they go around a park proved to be fun for parents and children and stimulated the children to make up their own stories helping them to put their thoughts into words. And they can take a Story Quest book home with them.

These families live with massive uncertainty. Jackie, Gill and Ryn help them to recognize their unique strengths and survival, what works best for them and how to find solutions in order to adapt.

Now it is back to support by phone calls, texts and WhatsApp.



Children into a school

Since the end of September, five new families with 18 children from Bangladesh, Somalia and Syria have arrived in Stoke on Trent. Some have been living in a hotel for a year and their children have not attended school, others have only been in the UK for a few weeks.

The practicalities of enrolling in school and college remains challenging for Ryn but relationships with schools and the City Council, honed by shared working during the summer, enables any issues to be quickly resolved.

One mother, from China, was frightened of her children becoming ill with coronavirus that she refused to return her children to school. *"I'm scared; my children are all that I have."* She thought she could 'home school' but her English is limited. Education Welfare were putting pressure to return her children to school and there was reluctance to use an independent translator so she could make an informed decision. The mother turned to Asha, who knew her and her children and Ryn was able to mediate between her and the school. The children went back to school in October and Asha has provided a Notepad as the family have no TV or access to the internet.

One hundred children now have a Notepad. Before these children were seriously disadvantaged which made their mothers feel inadequate. The children love school and are happy that they are able to look at the same things as their classmates and they feel more involved in their learning.

A single parent with six children between one and 14 were moved by a London Social Services department to Stoke but our Social Services were not allocated the case and due to Lockdown could offer little. Additionally, the Mum only spoke Arabic and the children only had one set of clothing. Fortunately, Asha was contacted and were able to provide food, clothing, toys and craft activities for the children and link them to an Arabic speaking family. Enrolment in school got underway and liaison with Social Services continues when necessary.

Often children become their parents' interpreter, main supporter and recipient of information way beyond their years. Parents may miss medical, school or legal appointments through apprehension of authority. Accompanying a parent to an Early Years Assessment can make all the difference.

Children's Activity Worker

Ryn began as Asha's children's worker responsible for the Saturday children's club and work arising from this. As her link role between parents, schools and other agencies has grown, she has less opportunity for the interactive work with children, so essential for their emotional and psychological well-being.

This is why Asha is pleased to announce that Henni Hill has been appointed as a Children's Activity Worker. She will dedicate her time to developing online learning and ways of promoting well-being and social interaction amongst children. Henni is no stranger to Asha. She approached Asha to ask if she could talk to parents and children about their experience of education for her dissertation. It was suggested that she attend the Saturday clubs. She did and stayed as a volunteer.

Most children have had little to no opportunity to see their friends and Henni will help them to meet through social media and she will create an online version of the Saturday children's group.

Changes to asylum support

- The temporary asylum support increase from June 2020 will be made permanent with a very small increase - support rate for people in dispersal accommodation will be £39.63 per week - a 3 pence increase from the June amount.
- Those in full board accommodation (e.g. hotels) supported under section 95 or section 4(2) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 will receive payments of £8 per week to cover clothing, travel and non-prescription medication
- Those who have been in full board accommodation will also get some backdated support: £3 per week for clothing needs will be backdated to either 27 March or the date on which someone was granted support, whichever date is later.
- £4.70 per week for travel needs will be backdated to 1 July or the date on which someone was granted support, whichever date is later. These backdated payments will be subject to reductions where accommodation providers have provided financial support.



Word of Resilience 24-26 November 7.00 – 8.00 pm

Each night a host of authors, celebrities and poets will explore the concept of resilience through literature, as they read, speak and perform alongside survivors of torture.

For tickets and more information, www.freedomfromtorture.org/ResilienceFestival

Asylum seekers in Sandbach

In May, Asha was alerted 50 asylum seekers, including minors, being accommodated in Chimney House Hotel, half a mile from the M6 and two miles from the centre of Sandbach. This aroused immediate local concern because of the hotels' isolation and the likelihood that the £5.00 allowance for toiletries would not go far if an asylum seeker needed credit on their phone to contact their solicitor or immigration advisor. Several local people sprang into action and asylum seekers have been self-referring to Asha by phone. With help from Asha supporters living in the area, local individuals and groups were contacted to mobilize support. Food has been delivered and help to photocopy and complete forms. None of this is, of course, made any easier by lockdown and social distancing.

Asylum Guide

It has been Godfrey's ambition to produce a diagrammatic guide to assist understanding of the processes of applying for 'leave to remain.' Now, with Tamba's help, Asha has a guide in English, Arabic, Kurdish, Amharic, Tigrayan and Farsi. It is so important that newcomers quickly understand on that they are a part of the process of applying for asylum and what they do on arrival may help or hinder their application.

Training

Godfrey has been delivering training to the Good Things Foundation, the UK's leading digital inclusion charity, to improve their capacity to deliver services to BME communities and men and women seeking asylum.

Asha wellbeing workers attended online training in FGM with Leyla Hussain of the Dahlia Project. Leyla, an FGM survivor, a powerful film which increased awareness of FGM and, more importantly, the confidence to talk about it. This has opened conversations with women and especially those from communities where this practice is still unfortunately not uncommon. As a result, many suffer gynecological problems throughout their lives because of what happened when they were a child and find it a relief to talk about it in confidence.

Casework

John (trustee and volunteer) is shielding and is assisting asylum seekers from home. Adnan, an Iraqi Kurd, has refugee status and lived in a housing association flat. Deeply troubled and distressed by constantly noisy neighbours and forfeiting any sleep, he got in touch with John. John was able to speak to the housing association who, having refused Adnan a move, listened to his story and moved him to a quiet flat where he feels calmer and able to settle.

Lydia continues to field enquiries which would formally have been addressed to the British Red Cross or Refugee Action.



A walk in the park