

Brushstrokes Messenger

Father
Hudson's
Care

"We must be in the hand of God like a brush in the hand of the painter"
Nicolas Barré

December
2020

Christmas Reflection 2020

By Mikhael Ahmad nS.J. & Eamonn Walls nS.J.

It was Mother Teresa of Calcutta who said, "We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop were not there, I think that ocean would be less if not for that drop."

Andy Williams really was spot on when he sang, "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" So with all the uncertainties, fears and anxieties of this year I think we are all (in our own way), looking forward to the festive season. And quite rightly so! However, amidst the busyness of our preparations and plans I think it is consoling to reflect upon the story, and receive the gift that God so generously gave to all of us on that first Christmas Day.

Let us then contemplate this special scene for just a moment.

A young couple, who were expecting their first child to be born any day, had to make a gruelling journey of some 90 miles from their home in Nazareth to a little town called Bethlehem (all by foot I might add!), with the ever-present dangers that this held. Arriving, they find that there is no room, no welcome and no hospitality to be had. Thus, this exhausted wife and husband are forced out into the margins of the town, into a place out of sight. And what do they find? A cave, and a feeding trough used for livestock. Let me ask you, what would you have done if they arrived at your door? What would you like to have done?

So amidst the elements and animals, and that bright star in the sky they find refuge. It is here, in this unlikely setting, that God became human for you and for me. It is here that God came and dwelt amongst us. And it is here that God gave us the gift of himself to all peoples so freely and compassionately.

This very giving nature of God to all is a source of great comfort and peace. Therefore, just as we have received so freely the gift God gave of himself, might we too be moved to compassion this holiday season to give of ourselves. In whatever we do, whether that is offering our prayers, our time or our resources to others, may we do it with great love. Because we must remember that even a smile or a gentle word can change the course of someone's day.

We need only look back over this year to see that the rules and regulations that keep us at a distance from each other, have not stopped us from finding new ways of connecting, loving and sharing. How wonderful it is to notice the relevance of the message of the nativity still alive and dwelling amongst us.

And so I implore you, allow your own small drop of compassion, love and sharing to fall ever so freely into the ocean of our world. Because without you, it would be just that bit less.

On behalf of the Brushstrokes Community project, may you have a truly blessed, safe and Merry Christmas.

Mikhael Ahmad nS.J. & Eamonn Walls nS.J. are Jesuit Novices, who volunteer at Brushstrokes.
The Jesuit Northwest Novitiate is currently based in St Mary's College Oscott, Birmingham.



Advent Message
By David Newall
Brushstrokes Project Manager



As we enter the season of Advent this year the poignancy of waiting is felt all the more keenly. This year many have had to experience real hardship. The pain of separation from friends and family, the loss of health and loved ones, forced closure of businesses, furlough or loss of employment and financial hardship have impacted us all. We wait this Christmas for an opportunity to spend time with family again for a brief time and hope that in following the current COVID guidance and the introduction of a vaccine we can return to a greater sense of normality.

For some of those Brushstrokes is privileged to work with restrictions, isolation, and separation have been their experience pre-COVID and will likely remain at the point when it is all over. We can't expect to understand what they have been through, but we can stand with them offering a welcome and hospitality, with simple acts of kindness, support and friendship that let them know we are glad they exist and are Welcome in Sandwell. If you want to join with others in being part of that welcome could I encourage you to sign up to Sandwell Borough of Sanctuary (<https://sandwell.cityofsanctuary.org/>) this Christmas.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have helped and supported Brushstrokes through their time and generosity over the past nine months helping us to respond and adapt to the challenges COVID has brought to the organisation and those we work with. From our amazing delivery drivers and resource team who have prepared and delivered over 2100 food parcels since April; to those providing advice and making over 500 welfare calls; to our innovative ESOL teachers who stepped up to develop on-line classes enabling learners to continue to develop their language skills; our funders and partner organisations who work with us to support new communities. Finally, a special thanks to those special individuals who forgetting their own needs have brought others to Brushstrokes for urgent support.

Thanks for standing with us and we wish you all the best for the New Year, hoping that we won't have to wait too long before we can meet together again.

Dave

We are really grateful to Keydi, a Primary school teacher from Honduras who so kindly offered to come in to the Brushstrokes centre one Saturday in order to decorate our reception area for Christmas. Keydi, together with her husband and daughter, has been in the UK for twelve months. The family receives ongoing resources support from Brushstrokes and she wished to express thanks by giving us the gift of her creativity. Keydi says she misses the children from her class in Honduras very much, especially four students who have special educational needs, and often sheds tears when she contacts them via Whatsapp. All the decorations were made at home by Keydi. She says, 'I love to help with colour — my heart is full of colour'. Thank you, Keydi, for sharing your colours and beauty with us this Christmas.



BREXIT

COVID did not stop the Brexit process and now we are nearly at the end of the transition period. What will this mean? In brief, for decades, EU citizens have had the right to live and work in the UK because of European Union law. As a consequence of the decision to leave the EU, EU citizens will no longer enjoy freedom of movement in the UK. From 1st January 2021 the UK will finally be separated from the European Union and many new rules will be introduced, including a new points-based Immigration System. Many EU Citizens are very anxious about their future lives in the UK from 1st January

and about possible returns after the Christmas holidays. That is why it is very important for them to be aware of the EU Settlement Scheme. Let me remind you about some of the key dates and facts:

1. EU Citizens who want to move to the UK must enter the country before 31st December 2020. If they have been here before and have simply travelled abroad for holidays they can safely come back home.
2. To continue to live or study in the UK, access NHS services or public funds, or travel in and out of the UK they must apply for settled or pre-settled status. The deadline for applying for this is 30th June 2021.
3. EU citizens must apply to the EUSS no matter how old they are! Children, parents, grant parents, brothers, sisters – everybody! It is not a choice – it is a legal requirement.
4. Pre-Settled Status (Limited Leave to Remain) is not changing automatically into Settled Status (Indefinite Leave to Remain). Remember, you do not have to wait until your Pre-Settled Status expires – when you are able to prove your 5 years of residence in the UK, you can submit a new application. And... WE CAN HELP HERE!
5. There is NO CARD or STAMP in the passport to prove Settled or Pre-Settled Status. EU citizens can ONLY use DIGITAL PROOF which is available on the dedicated GOV.UK website called "View and prove your immigration status".

And the most important thing to remember is that Brushstrokes' EUSS TEAM is here to help! COVID did not stop Brexit, but BREXIT did not stop us! We are happy to advise and help and make sure your rights are secured. So, keep calm, enjoy the Christmas Holidays, and call us after New Year if you need any support!

Karolina Borkiewicz-Singh
Senior EUSS Adviser



Here to Help

Left to right: Brushstrokes EUSS advisers
Karolina, Valentina and Ionut.



Many thanks to new volunteers Eamonn and Mikhail of The Jesuit Northwest Novitiate at St Mary's College Oscott, Birmingham. The guys have assisted us greatly in decorating the centre ready for Christmas as well as by delivering essential food packages to vulnerable people. They also collaborated to write the lovely Christmas reflection on the front cover. We are very grateful to them for helping us and we wish them every blessing as they embark on their religious journey.



The Reward of Patience

Brushstrokes finally celebrates with long-term client, Chidinma, who recently obtained her Leave to Remain after an extremely arduous immigration journey. Chidinma (affectionately known as Chichi) never gave up hope to secure a safe and better future for her children, saying, 'It has been a long road, but I am grateful I never walked it alone; thank you.'

Salman, her immigration adviser who has guided and encouraged Chichi throughout her application process, adds, 'Her tenacity and resilience is outstanding. Welcome to Sandwell, which we always

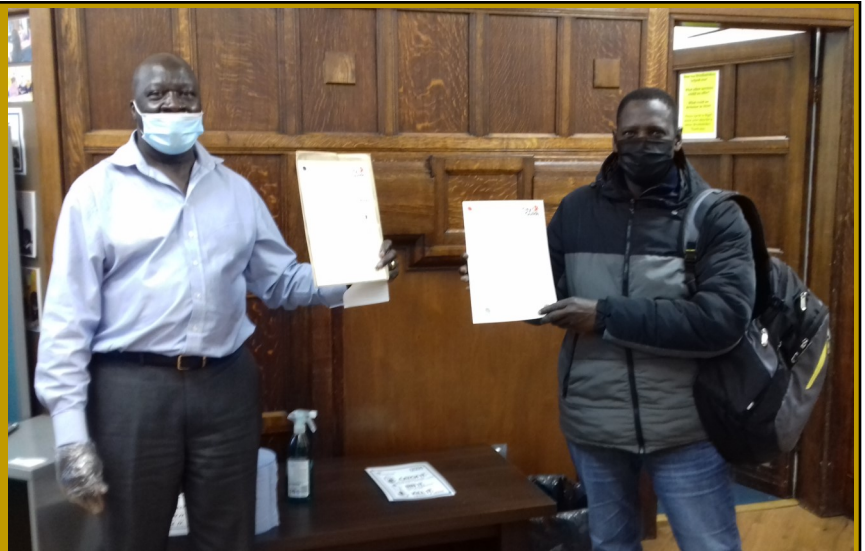
felt was your home, and thanks for the chocolate!'

Above: Salman and Chichi, and her kind gift of gold foil-wrapped hazelnut-chocolate treats

Salman Mirza
OISC Adviser

Well done!

Warmest congratulations to Anwar for achieving ESOL Entry 2 in Speaking and Listening. Dedicated Anwar attended Brushstrokes' beginner English classes before progressing to South and City College, Birmingham, where he continues to do well. He is pictured proudly displaying his new certificate to Brushstrokes' Early Action adviser, Lukano Omonson.



**Acknowledgment from Jo Watters, Head of Community Projects at Father Hudson's Care
to Jane Alsop, Brushstrokes ESOL Coordinator**

'I have been working with Dave ... [reporting for funding of our ESOL provision]. Can I just say that the numbers of students you are engaging with, despite the pandemic and it all being remote, is astounding! The funders I know will be impressed as I definitely am. Well done to you and the rest of your team.'

Thank you very much to all members of the Brushstrokes teaching department for everything you do for your learners.



Thank you very much to Chris from the Albion Foundation for unexpectedly delivering dozens of ready-cooked meals for us to give out to the people with whom we work.

Pictured here (left to right) are Chris, volunteers, Diane and Parveen, and Resources Assistant, Fatmire.





**"THE BICYCLE
HAS A SOUL.
IT WILL GIVE
YOU EMOTIONS
THAT YOU WILL
NEVER
FORGET."
-- MARIO
CIPOLLINI**

Brushstrokes Bike Project

Just a few of the many recent happy recipients of a bicycle, sourced, reconditioned and delivered by big-hearted Brushstrokes Immigration Adviser, and cycle enthusiast, Salman Mirza.



BRUSHSTROKES BIKE PROJECT

A Warm Welcome to New Receptionist/ Administration Assistant, Naz

Naz says 'My role entails general reception duties, welcoming users of the centre, signing in visitors, booking appointments, offering appropriate support to service users and dealing with incoming/outgoing calls.'



Once again this December, as with several others before, Brushstrokes has been fortunate to receive assistance with the wrapping of Christmas gifts prior to distribution to local children in need. We are extremely thankful for the generosity of all who have donated brand new toys and gifts for us to give out and

especially to the kind hardworking volunteer wrappers from Barratts Halesowen as well as the novitiate Jesuits of Oscott College, Birmingham.



Hello everyone,
My name is Shahla. I have worked as volunteer at Brushstrokes Community Project for about a year and a half. My volunteering involved two roles: first, data administrator for which I was inputting and updating clients' data to Advice Pro. My second role was EUSS triage in which I was welcoming and greeting EU citizens as a first line of contact and referring them to an adviser to make a Settlement application. I really enjoyed my volunteering role at Brushstrokes as the staff are very helpful and respectful. My volunteering role also gave me a chance to improve my skills including data entry, English language, and communication skills. Fortunately, my dream came true at Brushstrokes as recently I got a job in my field. My job title is Monitoring and Administrative Assistant in which I am monitoring and analysing information to create reports and statistics for my manager in order to provide the best service to our clients. I am also preparing invoices and expense sheets to the funders. I love everyone at Brushstrokes and am excited that I am part of this organisation which helps vulnerable people in Sandwell and the West Midlands.



Many thanks,
Shahla Ahmed



We are indebted to members of the Sikh community in Birmingham for your extremely generous and kind Christmas donation to Brushstrokes Community Project. Each year your support for our work humbles us.
Thank you.



The 2020 Election for the Chamber of Deputies and Senate of Romania



This month, I and my RUDA colleagues organised the polling station for the Chamber of Deputies and Senate of Romania here in Birmingham in collaboration with the Romanian Consulate in Manchester. Because we already had similar experience from last year during the presidential elections here in Birmingham, and because we had done a really good job, the Consulate of Romania from Manchester asked RUDA for support. So we found locations here in the West Midlands like the ones in Birmingham, Walsall, and Wolverhampton. We helped with organising the logistics to transport the polling booths to all the election poll stations. On Friday afternoon, we prepared the location to be ready for opening on Saturday morning at 7 o'clock. The voting process started on Saturday 5th of November and on the 6th of November from 7am to 9pm.

My role in this election was of Vice President for the Birmingham polling station and I helped my colleague Mariana Plamadeala, who was the president of the Birmingham polling station with all the requirements that she needed in order for the process to run smoothly. Together we ensured the best service we could offer to the Romanian Community. I'm really glad that I could be involved in this type of event, and I could help my community to

have the opportunity, under the current COVID19 situation, to fulfil their constitutional right.

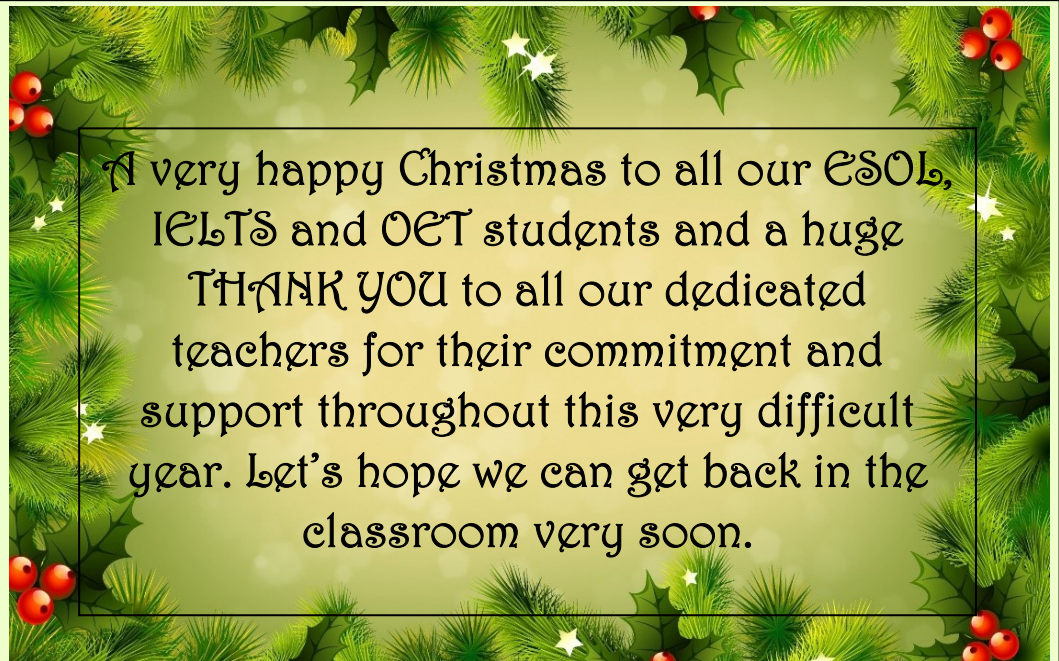
Ionut Matei

Brushstrokes Relief EU Settled Status Advice Worker



This is my 10th Christmas as ESOL Coordinator at Brushstrokes. The highlight of the year has always been the ESOL Christmas party – fun, friendship, fiendishly competitive musical chairs and all that wonderful food from all over the world. It'll be very different this year as our party will be online but it's still a great chance for everyone to get together at the end of term. Some of our Christmas resources are now online and available for students on iPads and phones.

Happy Christmas
Jane x



Christmas Thanks

By Lucy Clark

Brushstrokes Resources Coordinator

Throughout my adult life, Christmas has always been a special and favourite time for me. As a primary school teacher for 18 years, the 1st of December signalled Christmas themed lessons and glitter all over the carpet from the array of pictures and decorations made by the children. Christmas holidays have always been filled with family and fun, visits, presents and most importantly of all, time together.

This is why I love Christmas at Brushstrokes. Parties and food, music and presents and Santa coming along to surprise the children! Wonderful times for people to share together and experience a bit of UK Christmas cheer.

This year, things will have to be different. Because of the Covid pandemic, we are unable to hold a party day. We were even advised not to hold an open air 'event' on the car park due to being in tier 3. And we want to keep all of our staff, volunteers and clients as safe as possible. As staff we have identified over 200 children we would like to support with a gift this year. We have still held our Christmas appeal and have received lots of lovely gifts for these children and more – many parents know that we will do this and have asked specifically for their children to be remembered! Presents are being collected by St Francis Xavier and St Augustine's Primary Schools, by A is for Activism, by other private donors and through our Amazon wish list. It fills me with such joy to know that so many people care enough to support our campaign to help spread some love at Christmas.

These toys and gifts will be distributed at the food sessions during Christmas week, and by our fantastic team of delivery drivers that has grown as a result of the pandemic. We have been so blessed by the generosity of people over this year. Times have been hard for many of us and we constantly face difficulties every day, but the knowledge that so many people in our local community have come together to help

strangers, and then have gone on to create relationships and networks of further support, is very heart-warming.

I desperately hope that by Christmas 2021 we will be back to some kind of normal and we can welcome families into our centre once more; to see the smiles on the children's faces and celebrate with their parents. But until then, we continue to do all we can to spread joy and love, and show care to people who need it.

I wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas from all of us in the Resources team. We look forward to working with you in 2021.

Lucy



PIC•COLLAGE



We are very grateful at Brushstrokes Community Project to have consistent and kind support from a wide range of organisations. Sincere thanks to Sr Kitty Ellard of Infant Jesus Sisters, Ireland and England, for sending us a generous donation to our work. She writes:

I hope this finds you and all involved in Brushstrokes well. What a strange year which none the less has and continues to call for creativity to respond to the Pandemic in ever amazing and wonderful ways!

As we begin to travel the Advent road it is my joy on behalf of the Sisters to thank you for all the wonderful work you do and the love and hope you give to so many. The world would be a less welcoming place for so many without you! Thank you.

We are delighted to be able to make another contribution to the wonderful work and ministry of Brushstrokes. The task is huge and we pray that the Lord will continue to provide through the generosity of so

many and in such a variety of ways.

As always may you all continue to be 'in the hand of God like a brush in the hand of the painter' in the midst of the many needs and situations you try to respond to every day.

May you have a blessed Christmas and peaceful and healthy New Year.

Sister Kitty Ellard IJS
Province Leader



Asylum Guides at Brushstrokes

By Genna Yafai

Brushstrokes Receptionist/Administration Assistant

The Asylum Guides Project is a national programme aimed at organisations working with asylum seekers, to increase legal literacy, empowering people to be able to navigate and better engage with the complex asylum system. Brushstrokes was the first organisation to work with the Refugee Action's national scaling programme to deliver Asylum Guides.

Asylum Guides are trained volunteers, matched up with asylum seekers to provide legal information about the asylum process. Over the course of a few meetings, they explain the asylum system in a way that is accessible and easy to understand.

As the Co-ordinator for the project I oversee the recruitment, training and matching of guides with clients. We have recently recruited and trained five new Asylum Guide volunteers bringing the total number of Brushstrokes Asylum Guides to eight. They will soon begin to meet with our asylum seeker clients and begin guiding them through the asylum process, offering them information and support and empowering them to navigate their asylum journey with more confidence.

This initiative relies on the generosity of our volunteers, without which we couldn't run the project. We value their commitment and appreciate the time and effort they contribute to making a difference to those in search of a safer and better life.

Below are (left to right) Asylum Guide, Mary-Rose, and Asylum Guide Coordinator, Genna.





We are very grateful to Brendan, for donating to us a lovely wardrobe and writing bureau which were then delivered and fitted together by Brushstrokes Volunteer Coordinator, Martin. Pictured here is Awadh, who was happy to receive these items having just moved into his first independent accommodation.

Thank you to everyone, who, over the course of this year, has kindly given us items with which to help other people.

Warmest Wishes to All
for a Safe and Peaceful Christmas
and New Year,
from Everyone at Brushstrokes!



Please note that Brushstrokes Community Project will close on Thursday 24th December and reopen on Monday 4th January 2021

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Charity no. 512992

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Sisters of the Good Shepherd



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