

Brushstrokes Messenger

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

Nicolas Barré

December

2021

Christmas Reflection 2021

Christmas this year feels different to this time last year. Whilst we are still living with Covid and seeing its devastating effects for many families and around the world, there is that glimmer of hope.

Things seem to be moving in the right direction.

There is a hint of light in the darkness.

How appropriate that many of our homes, high streets, shops, and offices are decorated with colourful lights keeping us bright and bringing joy as the winter nights draw in and daylight shortens. Hope and light are at the heart of the season of Christmas.



Imagine for a moment, a young couple, forced by authorities to journey away from their home and family. Expecting a child to be born at any moment. Searching for somewhere to give birth in a strange, busy place then being forced to flee to a foreign land. Refugees seeking a place of safety with their young child. Maybe this isn't too difficult to imagine. A story that could still be all too familiar to us in the modern day is the Christmas story.

Mary and Joseph sought rest in Bethlehem to give birth to Jesus. Shortly after the birth they were forced to seek refuge in Egypt. It hardly seems the story that would signal the beginning of a new hope, a story of light.

However, for millions around the world, the coming days of Christmas serve as reminder of the hope and light found in God. Jesus is given the title, Light of the World, God made human to ensure that God is ever present to each of us in all our needs. The light of the star that shone brightly over that scene of Jesus' birth was a literal light in the darkness. Jesus continues to be a light in the darkness of the world. God became man to know our sufferings and to set us free.



As we approach this Christmas with a growing sense of hope of an end to the pandemic, let the many Christmas lights you will see, be a reminder of the hope of this season. The hope of a brighter time ahead for all people. The hope that started with the birth of a small child in less-than-ideal conditions which came to mean so much for so many. We wish you a very joyous, hope filled Christmas.



Merry Christmas





Christmas Gifts party

A great time was enjoyed at Brushstrokes during our Christmas present distribution festivities. Numerous families, including an abundance of excited children, arrived during the three allocated slots. They were treated to festive snacks, drinks and music, as they keenly awaited their special visit to Father Christmas. As our photos show, there were lots of smiley faces and this would not have at all been possible without all areas of Brushstrokes pulling together. A great amount of donations were received from the wider Brushstrokes community; staff and volunteers dedicated hours to present wrapping and gave up their weekend at this busy time of the year to ensure that our families had a wonderful and present-filled Christmas! Thanks to everyone for their help! *Feliz navidad! Joyeux Noël! Wesolych Świąt Bożego*

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“Thank You Claudia”

The picture shows Dave Newall presenting our volunteer driver, Claudia O’Grady, with a “Thank You” medal for volunteering throughout last years Covid lockdown. The presentation was made at our AGM and Claudia was invited to answer a few questions so as to talk to the Senior Management about her volunteering and what impact this made over lockdown.

Claudia is one of our volunteer drivers who picked up and delivered food parcels every week to those living too far to get to Brushstrokes for support. Claudia became a valuable lifeline delivering food parcels to families and other vulnerable adults throughout lockdown. It was a pleasure to be able to surprise her with a presentation “Thank You” medal at our annual AGM held on Tuesday 14th December.



Martin McNally (Volunteer Coordinator)

Funding Grant for the Kitchen relaunch



Pictured : Ellen Crooks (Community Colleague Asda Cape Hill) and Dave Newell (Brushstrokes Manager)

We had a special relaunch of our community cafe with a donation from the Asda foundation. It's been great to welcome back old friends and new ones to the Cafe since we re-opened last month. Ellen Crooks is our local Asda community champion.

Welcome back CAFÉ opening: On Friday 3rd December we were pleased to have celebrated the opening of our Community Café. With a new team of volunteers helping with setting up tables, preparing food and serving lunches it was a great success with nearly 30 free lunches being served to the local community. A special thank you to the Asda Foundation for help with funding the event and towards costs of reopening. Asda has a “Bringing Communities Together” fund to assist local projects to get back up and running after the Covid-19 lockdown. These monies have assisted with new aprons, table clothes, celebration food and signage making the occasion a special GRAND opening. Brushstrokes was also honoured by visitors from some of the Trustees from Father Hudson’s Care. The volunteers and staff really appreciated their words of praise and encouragement.

The lunch also show cased some of the work of our Music For Wellbeing with staff and volunteers singing and playing instruments after lunch.

By Martin McNally (Volunteer Coordinator)



Pictured : (Left to Right) Babatunde Oyenekah (Volunteer) Jane Wilton (trustee) Alwina Coetse-Evenson (Volunteer) Peter Deeley (Trustee) Tobi Ogedele (Columban Volunteer) Saturnin Ziangbango-Ngbando (Volunteer) Costacia (Volunteer) Julia Fitzsimmons (Trustee) Eamonn Walls (Jesuit Novice) Frank (Volunteer) Mikhael Ahmad (Jesuit Novice) Anita Iyoha (Volunteer) Martin McNally (Volunteer Coordinator)



"It's been another challenging year as we have all continued live in the shadow of COVID, changes in migration patterns and policy. Yet there has been so much to celebrate and admire in the spirit of partnership and welcome demonstrated in Sandwell, where so many have pulled together to ensure that strangers are made welcome in our community and given the help they need. Thanks for being a part of this great response in Sandwell.

On behalf of the team at Brushstrokes I'd like to thank our fantastic team of volunteers, old and new for giving so generously of their time and talents this year. We are so grateful to all of you who have supported our work through prayer, donations of foodstuffs, clothes and finance in 2021. Special thanks are also due to our funders and those organisations who we have worked alongside on projects this year too. Together you have made what we do possible.

As a team we would like to wish you all a Happy Christmas and we look forward to continuing to work with you in the New Year.

Dave Newall

Project Manager "

To a truly amazing Team, the Immigration and EUSS Team have provided support to our clients this year without the team, our clients would be struggling to access face to face advice.

A huge Thank you and appreciation for the hard work the team have undertaken this year.

Thanks to Lukano, Salman, Karolina, Camiquea, Sema and Arub who have supported each. other.

Jas

Immigration Advice Manager

During this year, the Advice Team have provided a phenomenal level of support and assistance to people who have accessed our services. There have been significant challenges, including the effect of the changes to welfare benefits legislation affecting EU clients, and the continuing anti asylum focus of the present government.

A 'welcome' can be a handshake, or a quick 'hello", but at Brushstrokes it's much more. Our 'welcome' has meant that clients have been able to access professional and expert assistance on a variety of issues- Immigration, housing, welfare benefits, family support, and is much more than a fleeting greeting.

Our 'Welcome' also extends to providing employment and training advice, to enable our clients to show and use their skills, knowledge and talents which will enrich our communities. We are ultimately, all neighbours.

Neil McAuley

Advice Services Manager

Warm thought of 2021

The year 2021 has been filled with many ups and downs, more downs than ups, particularly with Covid-19 impacting on the service, employment and people's personal lives.

I have leaned heavily on my colleagues and am so grateful for the support provided at short notice or during issues of homelessness, particularly where English is not the first language. If we can help each other, we do, I am grateful for how flexible my colleagues are and ready to offer advice and guidance in order to have a positive outcome for our service users.

From Reception, Resources, Cleaners, Immigration, Housing, Asylum Team etc., Thankyou .

See you, God willing in 2022

Lorraine

Advice Worker

Warm thought of 2021

I originally started at Brushstrokes as a volunteer, on reception, then in welfare calls during the pandemic and then on resources. I was always welcomed. This Autumn, I finally became a fully fledged member of staff as the new Advice and Family Support Worker and I have been warmly welcomed into the Brushstrokes family. It has been a fascinating three months getting to know what the job might entail and meeting the families who need support. It has at times been quite an intense role but I have been generously supported and encouraged in the role by those around me. I thank the staff at Brushstrokes for their kindness and guidance in creating the role to be what it is.

Anna Lockley-Scott

Advice and Family Support Worker



The Community Shree Krishna Mandir have donated Christmas gifts for adults and children. (Pictured left to right) **Martin McNally, Jyoti Makan, Rhyanna Makan and Fatmire Braha**

Thank you so much for your generous donation of gifts which were received on 17th December 2021.

Appreciation

"Brushstrokes has been very good to me and carried out responsible work for me. Previously Brushstrokes helped my son and I apply for ILR and now my daughter Simranpreet, with the help of Lukano has received her British Citizenship. Now my daughter has her Citizenship we can now start planning to visit India which she is very excited about, thank you for everything you have done for us."



Pictured left to right; Dalvir Kaur, Simranpreet and Lukano

Vrkoč workshop to celebrate International Migrants Day

To celebrate International Migrants Day on the 18th December, Brushstrokes came together with the Mothership and Czech artist, Tereza Buskova, to host a festive workshop based on a Slavic Christmas tradition. Five family groups learnt how to decorate bread wreaths (known as Vrkoč), and



showed a great amount of imagination to create their own decorations out of sweet dough. To add to the festive feeling we had musical accompaniment courtesy of Czech Christmas carols and a violinist (Oliver) from the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. The participating service users came from a range of countries, including Sudan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq, and they shared a great time learning about this festive and appetising tradition.



Bring & Share Event

A thoroughly enjoyable time was had by service users, volunteers and staff at Brushstrokes' Bring and Share event. Organised primarily by our Service User Panel, the event gave us the opportunity to bring along food from our home culture and share it with fellow members of the Brushstrokes community. The amount of effort that went into the food preparation and the diversity of food on offer was certainly impressive. To mention just some of the food that we were treated to, we can draw upon puff puff and jollof rice courtesy of Nigeria; coconut chicken and coconut bread from Honduras; lasagne from Italy; biryani, lamb curry and mint chut-



ney from Pakistan; empanadas and refried beans from Nicaragua; lamb head from Namibia; pasta and chicken from Algeria & Caribbean rice and peas. Alongside the culinary creations, we were treated to traditional Honduran dancing, as well as a flavour of Nigerian singing, dancing and an informative talk about Nigeria. We all went home with full bellies whilst also looking forward to future culinary inspired events.



Orientation Event

This month, Brushstrokes hosted its Orientation event for new service users to the area. The pandemic had put a stop to this regular event, and recent government recommendations to work from home also impacted the turnout this time. The Orientation event is a valuable opportunity for service users to hear from key services and organisations who they are likely to interact with as they settle and integrate into their new surroundings. Those who were able to attend or send through a digital contribution included Migrant Help, Fircroft College and Bearwood Community Hub. Brushstrokes staff also provided a summary of the variety of services that we offer. Once the current challenges posed by Covid-19 are hopefully brought under control, organisations and services who we hope will attend future events include different sectors of the NHS, the Police, Fire Service, local education institutions, community and leisure centres, places of worship, banks and the library service.



Dreams Project



Here at Brushstrokes, we didn't allow the pandemic to stall our collaboration with Iranian artist and photographer, Amak Mahmoodian. The initial plan to bring creative minds together was for Bristol-based Amak to venture up to Brushstrokes to present her Dreams Project and to speak with potential contributors. However, amid the current more cautious approach to in-person meetings, we reverted to the trusty medium of Zoom. Participants learnt about the Dreams project which explores the theme of exile and how experiences of this can impact people's dreams. As we learnt on the day, when it comes to 'dreams' it's those that we experience whilst we are sleeping (rather than our 'hopes & dreams') which Amak is exploring through this project. You can check out Amak's work [here](#), and her forms of expression are via photography and poetry.

How much is the new borders bill costing you?

23,000 (refugees) X £46,000 (annual prison cost) X 4 years (prison sentence for escaping persecution)
= £423.2 billion!



New borders bill voted in

The government have voted for the new asylum borders bill, which will mean;

It will be legal to turn away refugees in boats

Jail people who come to the UK claiming asylum for up to 4 years

Take away second generation migrants citizenship for national security issues (this could include people who organise and attend protests)

This no doubt will be challenged in the courts and brushstrokes hope to be a part of this process.

Brushstrokes alongside other community groups opposed the bill and our local MP voted against it.

Brushstrokes will continue to welcome the stranger and be part of a movement that will campaign for our community when seeking sanctuary

Birmingham live community journalist visits brushstrokes and hears our stories of hope

Birmingham live community journalist Aida Fofana visited our community cafe and listened to how our volunteers and clients made a difference to others helping out. She was also interested in our clients who against the odds made a life for themselves in Sandwell and never gave up hope for a better life





Brushstrokes will be closing at 12.00 on Friday 24th December and re-open on Tuesday 4th January at 9.00

Contact us:

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Brushstrokes receives support from:

