

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 2018



Advent Reflection by Oliver Santin

The story of Christmas is the story of God becoming man. This is the Christmas story.

The story starts with a young couple who were expecting a child. Mary and Joseph had to leave their home in Nazareth for the little town of Bethlehem. When they arrived the town was full and there was no accommodation for the young couple. With nowhere else to turn, Mary and Joseph took refuge in a cave, used as an animal shelter, among the beasts sheltered from the elements. It is amongst these conditions that Mary gives birth to her son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger (an animal feeding trough). The child came into the world poor and in a cold cave with

no place to lay its head. The poor, humble little baby is God Who became man in every way but sin, that we might know and love Him, that we might share in His perfect, infinite Love. God becomes a refugee for our sake! This is why the season of Christmas is a time of joy, a time of hope. Because God so loves you and me, that He humbled Himself to such a degree, that we might turn back to Him. God is infinite Love and love is selfless, love pours itself out for the one loved. And this God has done for you.

Pictured right are Catherine, Yemane, Sis Juliana, Fr. Damien, Oliver and Seema.

Brushstrokes Community Project wishes everyone a happy, safe and peaceful Christmas holiday.



A Happy Welcome to Harriet

My name is Harriet Thuambe and I recently joined Brushstrokes as a Senior Advice and Outreach Worker. I will be involved in a lot of outreach work and working closely with our wonderful volunteers. I'm so excited to be part of the Brushstrokes family. Thanks to all the staff for a lovely and warm welcome.

Prior to joining Brushstrokes, I worked for the British Red Cross in Birmingham as a Casework Coordinator on a project called Surviving to Thriving which supports unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and refugees aged 11- 25. I worked closely with the UASC team across different local authorities. I also worked in the East Midlands as a Caseworker within the Red Cross Refugee Support team in Nottingham and Derby. As a former volunteer myself, I'm looking forward to sharing my personal experience of volunteering and learning more from our lovely volunteer team.

Outside work, I'm an active member of St Rose Church and I support altar boys and girls. I'm the team leader for the African Community in my local area and coordinate a lot of church events such as inter-cultural events at my church. I like to read social policy work especially those which relates to migration issues.

I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone at Brushstrokes for welcoming me. Kind regards, Harriet.



Re-Union Netball Link at Brushstrokes by Carol Mendez



The Re-Union Netball Club is based in West Bromwich, Sandwell.

The club was formed as a result of an England Netball initiative called Back to Netball in June 2009 – women have taken part in Back to Netball and realised the benefits of getting involved. From losing weight, developing the body's cardiovascular system and improving muscle tone, taking part in Back to Netball is great for you in so many ways.

Back to Netball sessions provide women of all ages with a gentle re-introduction to the sport. Run by a passionate and enthusiastic coach, sessions cover the basics of the game including passing, footwork and shooting. Sessions finish with a friendly game to put the skills you have learnt into practice. You don't need any special kit, just clothes that you feel comfortable exercising in and trainers ideally that lace up. Make sure you bring some water and that you've had a snack a couple of hours beforehand. Many of our ladies had played netball at school and were not aware of how many netball clubs exists.

If interested, training is on Thursdays during 8pm – 9:30pm at George Salters, Davey Road, West Bromwich. The first two consecutive sessions are free of charge.

Our Back to Netball squad – their matches are played between 4 and 6 weeks at George Salters.

The League squad – their matches are played more regularly usually on a Saturday morning.

Our Mini Netball is for girls in year 3 to year 6. Their training is also on Thursdays at Oldbury Sports Academy from 5:30pm to 7pm.

Juniors train with our seniors, so those aged 12 and upwards can come and join us on Thursdays during 8pm – 9:30pm at George Salters, Davey Road, West Bromwich.

Re-Union Netball are always seeking players of all ability to join our team. If you are interested and would like further information please contact us via email:

reunionnetball@gmail.com or via our Facebook Page.



The Black Country Click Start Project seeks to provide a better understanding of IT. The project will specifically target anyone who is unemployed or economically inactive within the Black country area.



The Black Country Click Start Project is funded by the European Social Fund and the National Lottery, through the Big Lottery Fund. A special thanks to National Lottery players for making the funding possible. The Black Country Click Start Project is led by WHG and is part of the Building Better Opportunities program.



Some of the key areas Click Start will be concentrating on are:

Building confidence within IT
Email
Social Media
Internet Safety
Searching for volunteer and paid jobs online
Universal Credit support
Financial advice



For more information about the Black Country Click Start project, please contact Alaina Allen (aallen@walsallcollege.ac.uk). Please TEXT or CALL 07766 013 937.

We are very grateful to Alaina who runs a very popular basic IT class at Brushstrokes between 1500 and 1630 every Tuesday.



Well done to Shakeera (left) for passing her driving test at the fifth attempt. Shakeera, who assists Brushstrokes as a catering volunteer every Friday at the Community Café, shared her good fortune with us by bringing in sweets. You are a lesson to us in determination, Shakeera, and we wish you every success as a new driver.



A warm Brushstrokes welcome to keen Wolverhampton Wanderers fan, Kevin, who responded to our appeal for data inputting volunteers and now assists us each week with our monitoring processes. Kev, you are doing a fantastic job and we are very glad you are here!

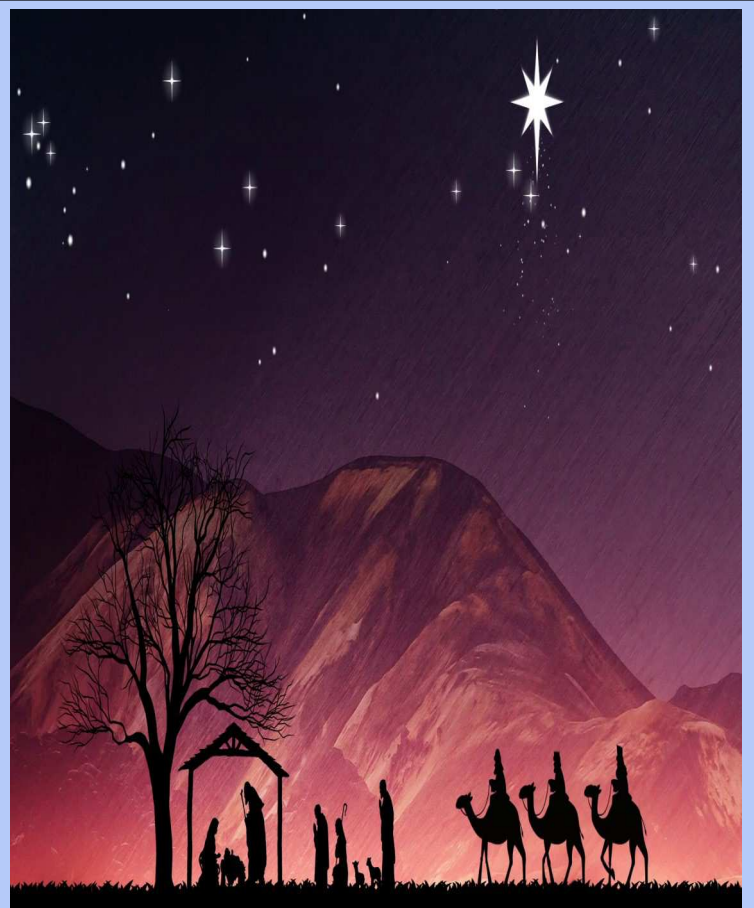
Many happy returns to Bani (above) on the occasion of her birthday. Bani helps us with reception duties and is always keen to lend us a hand when required. We hope you enjoyed your special day, Bani.



Thank you to Margaret Shoemark for this seasonal poem sent to us by Brushstrokes ESOL Volunteer, Vivien Heenan.

LET'S PUT THE CHRIST BACK IN CHRISTMAS

Let's put the Christ back in Christmas
 After all that's where Christmas began
 When a baby was born, who would change the world
 On the day that God became man.
 In the glitter of tinsel let's see the star
 As the wise men of old who came from afar.
 Let's relive the wonder of shepherds and kings
 Who saw angels descending on heavenly wings.
 Now it's get in the booze, the food and the chocs
 and we moan as we unwrap the tenth pair of socks.
 I'll be glad when it's over, the pessimists say.
 How sad, that they miss the 'real' joy of the day.
 In the hustle and bustle, let's stop for a while
 and give thanks to our Father above.
 Let's think, what can I give ? Not, what will I get ?
 In this season of peace, hope, and love.
 So let's put Christ back in Christmas
 Let's show xmas and crumble the door.
 And we'll follow that star to the stable again
 where we'll kneel, in reverence, and awe.





Parliament Week 12th – 15th November 2018

Parliament Week is an initiative run by the Parliamentary Outreach team and aims to inspire interest in parliament, politics and democracy. This year lessons throughout the week were on the topics such as parliament, voting, the work of an MP and 100 years of women's suffrage. An exhibition provided additional information related topics. IELTS students took part in an essay competition about Democracy and the winning entry will receive a £25 gift voucher and be published in the newsletter. We are grateful, as always for support from Surinder Singh, Electoral Engagement Officer, from Sandwell Council. Surinder



provided us with a Ballot Box and signs for our exhibition and popped in for an impromptu discussion with the Life in the UK class.



Success! Amina Akbarzai has passed her Life in the UK test. The test is not easy but Amina has worked really hard and has been attending Life in the UK classes at Brushstrokes since Sept 2017. Well done Amina!

Indicators of Integration Workshop

Many thanks to all who attended the Indicators of Integration workshop at Brushstrokes on Thursday 6th December 2018. It was a wonderful opportunity for refugees, EU citizens and other migrants to participate in a discussion about their perspectives and experience of community integration.

Participants had the opportunity to share their experience of integration and comment on the aspects of integration that they consider most important to them and their communities. Refugees and recent migrants have very limited chance to speak to those involved in developing policy and those present really appreciated this.

Thank you to Carlyne from the Home Office for your visit and to Professor Jenny Phillimore, University of Birmingham for your support in organising this event.





ARE YOU READY?

The benefits you can get to help you pay your rent are changing. A new benefit called Universal Credit is replacing Housing Benefit and some other benefits. Most people who live in Sandwell will no longer be able to make new claims for Housing Benefit anymore if they need help with their rent and should claim Universal Credit instead. You can only make a new claim for Housing Benefit in Sandwell if you are a pensioner or you have three or more children living with you; you can also claim if you live in some types of special accommodation.

If you are getting Housing Benefit at the moment, your benefit will continue for now, but Housing Benefit is slowly being stopped for everybody. The Department for Work and Pensions will contact you and tell you that you need to stop claiming your current benefits and apply for universal Credit. We don't know yet when this will happen exactly, it could be at any time from now, over the next two years, but the government wants to move everybody from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit. If you live in Sandwell and you get Housing Benefit on the home you live in now but move to a new home in Sandwell, your Housing benefit will continue for now, but you must tell the council that you have moved and fill in a new form. If you are getting Housing Benefit and move to a new home in a different council area your Housing Benefit will be stopped straight away and you will have to claim Universal Credit instead. So if you get Housing Benefit in Birmingham and move to Sandwell, or if you live in Sandwell but move to Birmingham – your Housing Benefit will stop and you will have to claim Universal Credit.

Sandwell covers all of Smethwick, West Bromwich, Oldbury, Tipton, Rowley Regis and Wednesbury. If you are not sure what council area an address is in you can check this online on the government website –

[Find your Local Council – Gov.UK](#)

It is very important that if you get any letters from either your council, the Job Centre or the Department for Work and Pensions you answer any questions or provide any information that you are asked for as soon as possible. If you want to claim help with benefits, don't wait – do it as soon as you can. If you don't you can lose money.

Oliver Wright
Sandwell Council



We are very grateful to the hardworking team from A.F. Blakemore & Son Ltd who visited us on Friday 7th December to assist with wrapping Christmas toys. The group, under the auspices of Business in the Community, worked tirelessly sorting and checking toys into suitable age ranges then wrapping neatly. Each gift was donated to Brushstrokes and will be given out to children over the Christmas period. Many thanks to Ian, Sam, Neil, Helena, Jen, Eleni, Michelle and Louise. It was lovely to meet you all.



a.f. **blakemore**
..... & son ltd

Many thanks to the children and staff of Our Lady & St. Hubert's Primary School, Oldbury who visited us on the 4th December to help us prepare baby packs and festive decorations and gifts to distribute to children and young people in need this Christmas.

School staff member, Aran Kaur wrote to Sally Debiage, Brushstrokes' Resources Coordinator: *'Hi Sally, I just wanted to say a huge thank you for having us in the centre today! The children came back and told Mr Doyle about what they did and how they felt. All the comments were so positive and they really had a valuable experience. Thank you for all the lovely treats you provided for us and to all the volunteers for your lovely hospitality. We appreciate your support and we hope the Christmas party goes well!'*



Christmas Thanks

We could not approach the end of 2018 without acknowledging all people and organisations that have helped us reach the 'hidden poor' of our community this year. From schools, councils, churches and business organisations to the anonymous individual who quietly places a bag of clothes in our doorway before going back out into the cold — our mission to affirm the rights and dignities of vulnerable people across Sandwell, West Birmingham and the Black Country would be made much more difficult without you. Thank you all.

Some organisations that have kindly helped us over the Christmas period include:

Nishkam Help, Birmingham

Bearwood Action for Refugees

St John Bosco Primary School, West Bromwich

St Philip's RC Primary School, Smethwick

St Austin's Church, Stafford

Warley Baptist Church

St Augustine's RC Primary School, Solihull

Sunrise of Solihull

Veolia UK

Crocketts Community Primary School — thank you so much for your lovely wrapped Christmas gifts. The care in which you decorated every item was noticed and is very much appreciated. Thank you so much for your kindness.

Grateful thanks to the Adult Social Care Wellbeing Dept at Sandwell Council for gifts of toys as well as a very welcome financial contribution to our work.

thank you



Thank you to Tesco, Springhill, Birmingham, who have supported us every week

throughout 2018 with bread, cakes and other food items. Your generosity means we can supplement the weekly food allowance of many people in need across our communities. Thank you for your kind support.

TESCO

Every little helps

We are very grateful to the staff and residents (above) of Sunrise of Solihull for donating really thoughtful gifts for new-borns. These lovely packages will be given out to mums as soon as possible.

And sincere thanks also go to the children of St John Bosco School, West Bromwich (right), for handing over such wonderful toys for our Christmas Toy Appeal. These will be wrapped and given to other children at our Christmas parties. Thank you for being so considerate of others and sharing at this time of year.





Thank you to Wrap Up Birmingham for your kind donation of winter coats and jackets to be distributed to people in need this winter. This is the second year of your support to Brushstrokes and we remain very thankful. Pictured receiving some of the items from Wrap Up Birmingham are Brushstrokes staff members, Nigel, Fatmire and Martin. Thank you to Sally for organising this drop off.

We're proudly supporting



WRAP UP BIRMINGHAM

Donate your old or unwanted coats to those in need at the following **Safestore** location

13th-24th Nov 2017

Birmingham South
Unit 4, Clyde Street
Digbeth, Birmingham
B12 0NY

Brought to you by  **human appeal** In partnership with 



Anwara, Fatmire, Costacia and Mary happily welcome the Christmas toys and gifts given to Brushstrokes by St Augustine's RC Primary School, Solihull. We are more than grateful for your kind generosity.

THANK YOU



Volunteer Commitment from Seema

I am a volunteer with Brushstrokes and hope to continue to volunteer lifelong. I was an IT software professional who programmed Databases, Datamarts and Management Reports. I worked on IT projects with companies such as the Wesleyan Insurance and Britannic Assurance. I also held senior roles within teams in IT Services at the University of Birmingham. More recently I completed my PG Diploma in Business Administration with Warwick Business School and am actively looking for roles where I can use my skills and experience in IT and business to make a difference. Despite these past lucrative roles and courses, there was an emptiness that I feel has now been filled by volunteering at Brushstrokes. I love helping out every Friday at the cafe that provides hot meals to anyone absolutely free with a service that's straight from the heart. I feel great joy in assisting with the Workclub - writing up resumes and helping people with online job searches and job applications. I have also started assisting Jane at the ESOL sessions and feel immense satisfaction in helping people learn. To be honest, I learn and gain much much more - job satisfaction, a sense of self-worth and being, contentment and happiness. I am very grateful to Brushstrokes for giving me the opportunity to volunteer. The warmth and appreciation of all the people who work here - Dave, Martin, Nigel and Jane and all the other staff and volunteers is very encouraging.

Seema Raymond



Outreach and Home Visits as part of Early Action and Homelessness Prevention Pathway Projects

As part of the Early action Project and Refugee Homelessness Prevention Pathway, I, together with Harriet, Catherine and Bani, and with support from Oscottian seminarians and Jesuits are carrying out weekly systematic outreach and home visits in the Sandwell area. We visit properties occupied by asylum seekers and people who are granted Leave To Remain, not only to ensure that all newly dispersed asylum seekers in Sandwell are provided with priority information, advice and guidance to enable them to navigate through the key stages of the asylum process, but also to prevent them from falling into crisis. We also provide information, advice and guidance to clients granted leave to remain, particularly those who have to move within 28 days notice given by G4S. We help by managing our Refugee Homelessness Prevention Pathway checklist regarding welfare benefits, housing, health and immigration etc.

Lukano Omonson
Brushstrokes Early Action Worker





Some happy faces at Brushstrokes' ESOL Christmas party. The event was very well attended and people brought delicious food from their own cultures to share with others. It was a chance, after a particularly busy year, for students to relax and enjoy one another's company. Thank you to all who attended the party and a special thank you to ESOL Coordinator, Jane, and all her lovely ESOL volunteers. You make a real difference to people's lives. Thank you also to Steve's 'special' jumper* :)





Thank you to HSBC Birmingham for sending a team of gift wrappers to help Brushstrokes to help prepare Christmas presents for us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you all a happy new year.

Pictured above are Lucy, Dave, Aman, Stuart and Andy.

HSBC 

Christmas Closing
Brushstrokes will close for Christmas on
Friday 21st December 2018
and reopen on
Wednesday 2nd January 2019



What's on at Brushstrokes 2018

Monday

Advice and Information 0900 — 1200: drop-in
 Advice session: welfare rights and benefits
 (appointments only)
 Resources distribution (appointments only)
 ESOL/IELTS classes

Tuesday

Food distribution (1200 — 1500)
 ESOL/IELTS classes
 IT class (1500 — 1650)

Wednesday

Advice and Information 0900 — 1200: drop-in
 Work Club 1500 — 1700 (appointments only)
 Resources distribution (appointments only)
 ESOL/IELTS/Life in the UK classes

Thursday

Food distribution (1200 — 1500)
 ESOL/IELTS classes

Friday

Immigration drop in service (0900 — 1100)
 Community Café (1200 — 1400)
 Resources distribution (appointments only)

Contact us:

Brushstrokes Community Project
 St Philips Parish Centre
 Watt Street (off Messenger Road)
 Smethwick, B66 3DA

Phone: 0121 565 2234

E-mail: info@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk

Website: www.brushstrokessandwell.org.uk

Brushstrokes receives support from:



Charity no. 512992

Parish of St Philip Neri



FareShare FoodCloud



INFANT
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