

NEWSLETTER

MARCH/APRIL 2024

Welcome to the Brushstrokes March newsletter!

March this year brings together three major and auspicious religious observances in a way that beautifully reflects the diversity of faith in our own community.

Ramadan began on the 11th March and for our Muslim community, the observance of Ramadan, which involves fasting from dawn until sunset from one crescent moon to the next (29 to 30 days), is regarded as one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

On the 24th March, Hindus mark the beginning of Holi, the festival of Love, Colours and Spring and is a joyous festival where people gather to have fun throwing brightly coloured paint and water at each other.

March this year also sees the Christian celebration of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, commemorating the resurrection of Christ from the dead following his crucifixion.

For Brushstrokes' work, March and the impending change of season sees us anticipating more outdoor work with our clients and volunteers, with the gardening group and the allotment volunteers particularly looking forward to new growing projects and the walking and cycling groups hoping for a break in the rain so they can better enjoy Smethwick in bloom.

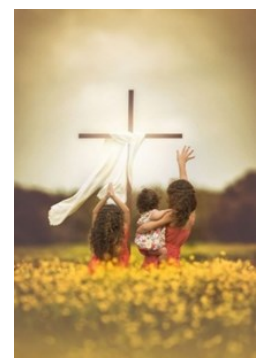
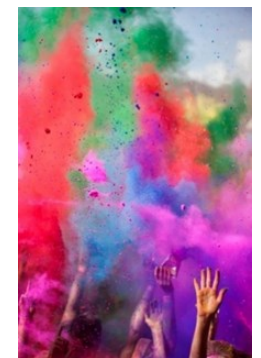
The warmer temperatures will also take the pressure off those utility bills which our more vulnerable service users find even more challenging than those of us living in relative financial stability.

As our minds turn to spring cleaning, we would ask that you remember us when clearing out any unwanted clothes or household goods. Donations are gratefully accepted whatever the weather.

We sincerely thank all of our partners and supporters for their continued generosity, and we would like to wish all of our service users, staff, volunteers and partners growth and abundance for the coming spring.

With Warmest Wishes,

The Brushstrokes team.



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WORKING FOR CHANGE

Report from The Commission on The Integration of Refugees



Dave with Commissioners

This month a report has been published which reveals that £1.2 billion would be contributed to the economy, if those seeking asylum had opportunities to learn English and were allowed to get a job within 6 months of arrival.

The report, *From Arrival to Integration: Building Communities for Refugees and for Britain* sets out recommendations which would improve the asylum system and enhance the lives of refugees and of the country as a whole.

Brushstrokes was visited by commissioners, Dr Ed Kessler, Professor Hanna Kienzler and Alphonsine Kagabago back in November 2020. They came to gain an insight into our work and learn about the difficulties for integration in and around Smethwick. Later on, Dave Newell, Project Manager at Brushstrokes, took part in the first commission hearing in Birmingham.

Evidence of how integration for refugees can be improved has been gathered from over 1,250 organisations, services and individuals, including Brushstrokes. Dave Newell said “It was especially important for us to submit evidence of the importance of access to English language classes at the earliest stage and access to employment”. Brushstrokes hold a number of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes and is one of the largest community providers in the Smethwick area.

Dr Assayed Dawood, originally from Sudan, was instrumental in providing the Commission with first hand lived experience. Assayed came to the UK in 2015. He is currently working as a GP assistant in Birmingham.

You can watch a video of his story [here](#).

“The UK’s asylum system is broken: it is expensive, ineffective, and harmful. There is a desperate need for new ideas on how to create a system that works effectively and enjoys public consent.”

Arrival to Integration: Building Communities for Refugees and for Britain

“We need to provide a new deal for refugees which is fair, deliverable, realistic and accountable. An asylum system that can work for us all. These recommendations basically reflect what good looks like.”

Arrival to Integration: Building Communities for Refugees and for Britain (video)



Assayed Dawood.

“

I did full time night shifts and then got the bus straight to the Brushstrokes classroom because one day I will practise medicine as a doctor again, as an NHS GP. That is my overall goal even if it takes years. It is a goal I will achieve. I am determined.

”

Assayed, a doctor from Sudan and a refugee



Dave and Assayed at the Birmingham local engagement hearing.

VOLUNTEER FAIR



On Wednesday 13th March, Brushstrokes held a very successful Volunteer Fair in conjunction with Smethwick DWP.

The event was a fantastic opportunity for clients and individuals from the local community to meet with organisations that are offering voluntary placements.

60 people registered their attendance, with 91% saying they would attend another volunteer event and 78% rating their experience between 4-5 star. Some of the clients in attendance said, "It was really good event. Thanks!" and "Well set up, great job!".

We are grateful to the local organisations who attended and helped to make this such a successful event: Free2Learn, Stepway, Citizens Advice Sandwell & Walsall,



Sandwell Museums, St Albans Community Association, Sandwell Libraries, Special Olympic Sandwell, Ideal for All, and Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations.

TABLE TENNIS, TEA, BISCUITS AND FUN

In March, we hosted the inaugural Table Tennis Tournament at Brushstrokes.

Participant Kabilan, who was representing Tamil Nadu state, India, commented:

"After months of playing table tennis at our Welcome Wednesday session, it was a great occasion to challenge myself against other Brushstrokes service users. We all now love table tennis and playing in the competition was a totally new experience. It was good to play against people from different countries such as Ghana, Kuwait, Syria, Britain, Kurdistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Ivory Coast. I am very proud of my medal and hopefully we can encourage more people to join in with our table tennis games, where there's always lots of tea, coffee, juice, biscuits and fun."



DR BIKE



Cyclists in the surrounding neighbourhoods should definitely be feeling more secure on their cycling adventures following this month's highly successful Dr Bike and Cycle Security Marking event at Brushstrokes. Karl and Jack from the Sustrans team were busy carrying out minor repairs, applying security marking to bikes, and distributing bike locks. It was great to meet such an array of people who constitute the local cycle community. A big thanks to Sustrans West Midlands. We look forward to further collaboration and getting more people out on their bikes.



SPRING HAS SPRUNG!



The men's group got their hands dirty in our garden space recently, repotting the seedlings that we'd sown in our previous sessions. We also planted some herbs and flowers to add some much needed fragrance and colour, and put up our nest boxes to support our feathered friends.

It was then time to head indoors to design wildlife gardens, and we even found time to enjoy some tasty samosas, have a warm drink, make an origami crane and enjoy nature-inspired conversations!

A massive thank you to the support and inspiration provided by Hayley and Ruby from Spectra and Olivia from the RSPB.



COMING UP

INTERVIEW SKILLS WORKSHOPS



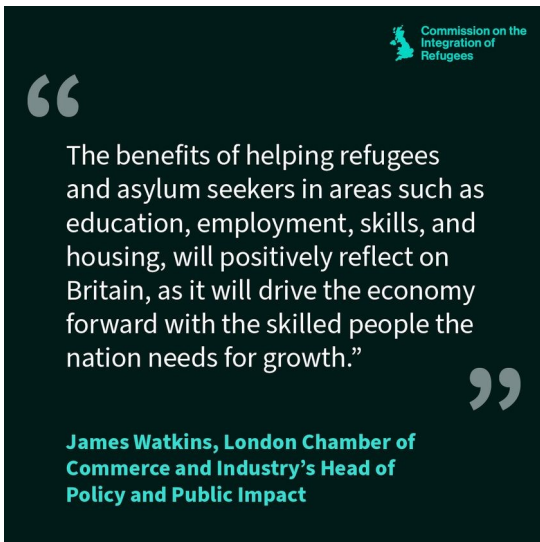
We are planning a series of workshops starting on 17th April.


These workshops aim to give people the skills and confidence they need to do well in job interviews.

Further details to be confirmed but if you, or anyone you know, are interested contact the Brushstrokes team.

WEEKLY WELL-BEING WALKS

Join us every Friday at 10.00 am for a walk round Victoria Park. Fresh air, exercise and friendship. What more could you ask for?




“
The benefits of helping refugees and asylum seekers in areas such as education, employment, skills, and housing, will positively reflect on Britain, as it will drive the economy forward with the skilled people the nation needs for growth.”
”
James Watkins, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Head of Policy and Public Impact

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



Do you like the satisfaction of seeing seeds grow into vegetables and flowers?

Do you enjoy being outside in the fresh air?

Do you like making new friends?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you could be just who we are looking for to help in the Brushstrokes' allotment.

This time of year we are getting ready for spring planting and need volunteers to help out on our allotment.

If you think you can help, please contact Henry.

henry@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
ESOL Classes 11am-2pm 	ESOL Classes 11am-2pm 	ESOL Classes 11am-2pm 	ESOL Classes 11am-2pm 	Music Wellbeing Sessions 10am-2pm 	Digital Skills 10:30am and 1pm 
Yoga Sessions (Women's Group) 10:30am-11am 	Digital Skills 9am-3pm 	Digital Skills 9am-3pm 	Digital Skills 9am-3pm 	Wellbeing Walk 10am-11am 	 Scan here to join our Telegram and receive updates
Art & Craft Sessions 1pm-2:30pm 	Foodbank 11am-2pm 	Gardening Club (Men's Group) 2pm-4pm 	Foodbank 11am-2pm 	Community Cafe 11am-1pm 	
Football Sessions (Hadley Stadium B66 4NL) 4:30pm-6pm 				Film Evenings (First Friday of each month) 6pm 	



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Harborne Parish Lands Charity
 Providing a service for those in need

Infant Jesus Sisters
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 BIG LOTTERY FUND

Sisters of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

REFUGEE ACTION

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