



Brushstrokes

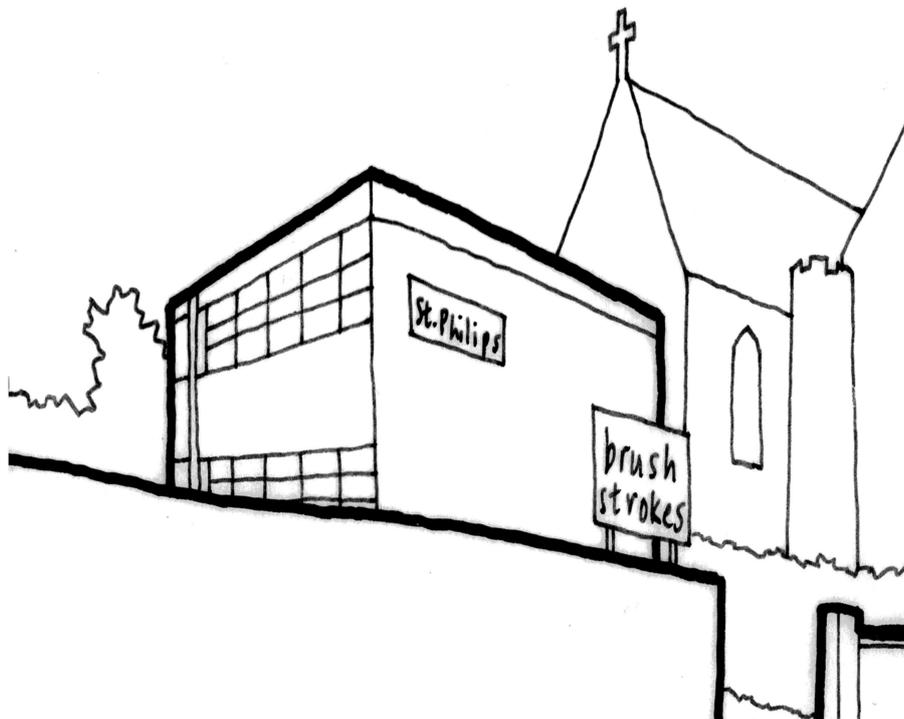
Brushstrokes Community Project

Annual Report 2016/17:

Creating cohesion,

Imaging integration

“We must be in the hand of God like a brush in the hand of the painter” Nicholas Barré



Management Committee 2016 -17

Joanne Watters – Chairperson
Fr. Erasmus Egenonu C.S.Sp.
Sister Margaret Walsh
Keith Athiade
Julie Shields
Bhavna Solanki
Leighton Padotan
Roy Gardiner
Debbie Madden
Mary Tomlinson
Rabia Aslam

Brushstrokes Staff

Dave Newall – Project Manager
Jane Alsop – ESOL Coordinator
Martin McNally – Volunteer Coordinator
Nigel Chandra – Centre Coordinator
Blanka Stevenson – Outreach and Home support coordinator
Loreta Braha – Monitoring assistant
Arjana Osmani- Outreach support worker
Megan Sieprawska – Migrant support worker
Sally Debiage- Resources Coordinator
Fatmire Braha – Resources Assistant
Kathy Fryatt – Cape Hill cooking champions
Thomas Taggart –Domestic Assistant

*Brushstrokes founding partners are Father Hudson's Care,
the Infant Jesus Sisters and the Parish of St Philip Neri*



Charity no. 512992

Infant Jesus Sisters

Charity no. 234216

Parish of St Philip Neri

Charity no. 272581

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Hazera Begum
Paul Beech
John Bogard
Keith Collier
Barbara Eastgate
William Gurney
Stephen Hardman
Vivien Heenan
Breege Lavin
Anne Maher
Givashi John Mwangi
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Rebecca Tegaleka
Michael Weir
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Helen Westlake

Jesuit Novice

Pascal Calu
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Jollie Kwizera
Mary Rose Puttick
Charlotte Reynolds
Anya Webber
Oliver Williams

Outreach

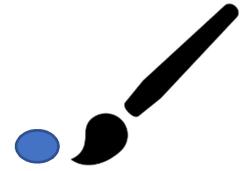
Lorraine Cruckshank
Kathy Fryatt
Ann Gregory
Barbara Jones
Breege Lavin
Hajar Nejad
Sara Packer

Administration

Hawar Amin
Shareena Begum
Muhammad Butt
Gurjit Dhariwal
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Resources & Catering

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Claudia Antici
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Anwara Bari
Mary Geach
Makbule Gokberk
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Mahtaj Shirazi
Asma Taheri
Mary Tomlinson



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Chair's report

2016/17 has been another busy and successful year for Brushstrokes Community Project. Brushstrokes has continued to grow from strength to strength, reaching out to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, expanding services and delivering quality support.

As Father Hudson's Head of Community Projects and Chair of the Brushstrokes Management Committee I would like to thank all of the Brushstrokes staff and volunteers for their hard work; without them we would not have achieved all we have this year. I would especially like to thank two key members of staff: Sandra Tittel and Teresa Clements. Sandra, the Outreach and Home Support Coordinator, worked at Brushstrokes for over 9 years before leaving in March 2017. Her knowledge and experience will be missed. Teresa, Project Manager for over 10 years, retired in March 2017. She has always ensured that welcoming, helping and supporting people is at the heart of Brushstrokes. I thank Teresa for her commitment to the project and to the mission of Father Hudson's Care.

Throughout this busy year there continues to be a large need and demand for the services delivered through Brushstrokes. We have supported 908 new individuals from 62 different nationalities. We now have 12 staff and 38 active volunteers, plus a wider group of external workers, partners and supporters.

Outreach, home visiting and housing support continues to be a key area for Brushstrokes. This core work has been supplemented by new drop-ins including welfare, counselling and immigration advice. This partnership working with others is key to our holistic support model.

18 regular ESOL classes are now being run every week with 212 learners and 118 exam passes. Well done to the students and to our dedicated ESOL Coordinator, Jane, along with her team of ESOL teachers, classroom assistants and volunteers. I have been moved to read the case studies of what a difference learning English is making to people's lives.

This year I have visited the community café on a couple of occasions and been inspired by people in the local community coming together. Volunteer support is a crucial part of this, so thank you to the volunteers and staff involved in making this happen every week.

Food is a basic need and as well as through the café, Brushstrokes provides food (4064 bags of food this year) to those in need along with clothing, baby equipment, baby packs and household items. This provision of resources meets people's most immediate needs and has been a lifeline for many individuals and families throughout the year.

We have been very pleased this year to secure Big Lottery Reaching Communities funding for our core staff and services for the next 4 years. We have also received funding from a range of charitable trusts, statutory grants and other donations.

Finally, I would like to welcome the new Brushstrokes Project Manager, Dave Newall. Dave is an experienced manager with expertise in the area of asylum seekers and refugees. Welcome to the team Dave; we look forward to working with you in 2017/18.



*Jo Watters,
Chair of Brushstrokes Management Committee
Head of Community Projects for Father Hudson's Care.*

Project Manager's review

2016/17 has seen significant change for the UK, our community and our organisation. The decision to leave the EU last June and recent events may have raised uncertainties and some fear and suspicion within communities, but have also provided countless examples of courage, generosity and sacrifice, demonstrating how people from diverse backgrounds can come together.

Brushstrokes has joined with others this year to provide reassurance and support, creating opportunities for community cohesion and experiences that 'welcome the stranger'. The Community Café where the homeless, local resident and new arrivals eat and serve together is a wonderful example of this.

The volume of new arrivals to Sandwell has remained constant this year; what is more noticeable is the increasing complexity of need among many of our new service users. Poverty, destitution, No Recourse to Public Funds, limited availability of housing, the impacts of the experience of trauma and domestic violence appear to have become more common in our outreach and support work. Through the provision of practical resources, casework, access to counselling made possible through the Early Help Innovation Fund and an immigration advice session we have been able to respond to many of these issues and help people.

At the end of the year we said farewell to Teresa and Sandra whose years of service to Brushstrokes leave a legacy of welcome, generosity and practical response to the needs of new communities.

At times of transition it is useful to reflect on our values and objectives and consider the difference our work makes to others. Since its inception Brushstrokes has sought,

'To provide practical assistance to those in need, and support people to realise their fullest potential through befriending, listening and teaching of skills, enabling the development of personal confidence and self-esteem.

Brushstrokes believes that by sensitively guiding each person to a greater awareness of available options, life choices are enhanced and lives empowered.'

Our reason for being is captured in the words of Nicholas Barré, "*We must be in the hands of God like a paint brush in the hand of a painter*", which inspired our name Brushstrokes. This report shows how we continue to create space for those of different faiths or none, from different cultures, languages and backgrounds to paint a vibrant picture illustrating the experiences of welcome and integration.

In my short time as project manager, it has been a privilege to see people working together creating something significant for and with those strangers in our midst. Providing a welcome with simple acts of kindness and generosity, and allowing people time and space to become part of this community. To our funders, supporters, volunteers, staff, management committee and those who use our service, thank you.

Priorities and Outcomes for 2016/17

1. To sustain the current level of staffing levels for four years and increase paid staff funded by the Big Lottery.
 - The Staff team has grown this year with the recruitment of a Centre Coordinator, Cape Hill Cooking Champion and a Resource Coordinator. Further funding is being sought to build our outreach and advice capacity in the coming year. Our Big Lottery funding started in September 2016.
2. To acquire suitable space for Brushstrokes to provide advice in a confidential setting and identify suitable accommodation for the project's resources and activities.
 - Limited progress has been made to secure adequate space for the growth of Brushstrokes activities. One positive development has been the creation of several satellite sites for ESOL and the outreach work with Our Lady of Lourdes in Old Hill. Accommodation for our projects and resources remains a priority for 2017/18 and we will actively pursue opportunities to extend our outreach offer.
3. To deliver quality outcomes for all our current and future funded projects during 2016/17.
 - The report highlights the range of outcomes achieved through our work this year. The work on refugee homelessness prevention and the Private rented sector work have resulted in positive benefits not just for migrants but for the Local Authority
4. To develop further links and partnerships with organisations providing services for newcomers including the Fatima House planned support services for destitute asylum seekers in Birmingham.
 - Partnership work this year includes the development of Together Smethwick volunteering hub, work with Connected Community Foundation on the Soho and Victoria employment support project and with Rights Equality Sandwell on a community advocacy project. Since March 2017 we have re-engaged with the destitution steering group and other organisations working with refugees, new migrant communities and advice providers.
5. To work with local partners to improve the employability prospects of refugees linked in to the development of the Midlands Metropolitan Hospital.
 - The redevelopment of the work club and our involvement as a partner in the EU funded USE IT project provided support to several refugees and migrants with overseas health qualifications. Brushstrokes will continue to develop this support over the life of the USE IT project and hopes to develop IELTS support for several of these individuals this year.

What difference did we make?

Addressing poverty

Poverty and destitution stemming from a lack of entitlement to welfare benefits, delays in processing of claims, sanctions or the impact of the low levels of asylum support has led to a significant increase in demand for food and food voucher support.



- In 2015/16, we provided 2304 food bags, this year we have provided 4064.
- In 2015/16, we made 168 referrals to the food bank, this year 319 were made.
- The demand for non-food resources also shows an increase this year.

Whilst the reduction of child poverty remains a priority for national and local government, we will continue to meet practical needs and develop clearer evidence that identifies both reasons for destitution and the impact on individuals' health and wellbeing.

English language

The number of learners on our English courses increased by 12 this year. Space and volunteers to teach on ESOL remain a significant challenge. We have begun to address this through the development of satellite sites and further volunteer recruitment. There are many more people wanting to join our courses than we can cater for.



It's a sign of how well regarded our ESOL provision is by the community that all classes were filled within a week of enrolment. As the case studies in the report show, there are no shortcuts or quick fixes to integration. At Brushstrokes, we are proud of the fact that we can provide an environment and work in a holistic way, enabling people to learn and grow in confidence and improve their level of English in ways that recognise and respect the range of other demands which are made of them.

Language is vital for integration, yet many of our learners are unable to access standard ESOL provision due to caring or family responsibilities, immigration status or lack of funds. Offering accredited ESOL qualifications is equally important for individuals' employment prospects. The quotes from learners in this report show the benefit ESOL is making to their confidence and capacity to engage in a range of activities and services.

Advocacy

Our outreach and advice work shows the increased level of demand and support we are now providing to individuals in West Birmingham (28% of new service users) and the spread of service users across Sandwell.

The development of the outreach and visiting provision in Old Hill has shown the benefits of being able to connect new arrivals with a more local welcome venue and we recognise some of the practical challenges individuals face travelling to our office from parts of Sandwell and beyond.

The opportunity to work with several local landlords, attend the Sandwell landlords' forum and create opportunities for landlords and migrants renting in the private sector has seen many benefits. Landlords who have engaged in this process have



made use of our housing advisor to help with disputes. Through developing this working relationship, it has been possible to secure accommodation for some individuals, as landlords have greater confidence in renting to them as they know what support we are

providing for prospective tenants. We supported 20 households to obtain private rented housing and helped others to resolve disputes with landlords or sustain their tenancy through advice benefits advice etc.

The lack of immigration advice in many parts of the Black Country has resulted in large numbers of individuals attending immigration advice sessions run by Salman Mirza this year. Increased numbers of refused asylum seekers and individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds have highlighted a need to invest in further training and partnership work on the Immigration and destitution agenda in the year ahead. Brushstrokes is seeking OISC accreditation this year.

Strengthening and supporting others

One of Brushstrokes aims has been to support the development of new initiatives to welcome and support refugees and asylum seekers. Over the past year we have talked to several parishes and schools about the Brushstrokes model of parish social action in supporting refugees. As a result, several have acted to support refugees in their area or have made valuable donations to Brushstrokes.



We supported a number of refugee community organisations and support groups this year. Our involvement in Together Smethwick has supported the development of a new volunteering hub. New partnerships are being forged between the NHS and voluntary and

community sector and local Universities as part of the USE IT project. Finally, the community advocacy project has involved us working with three other new community organisations in the development of advocacy work for new migrants.

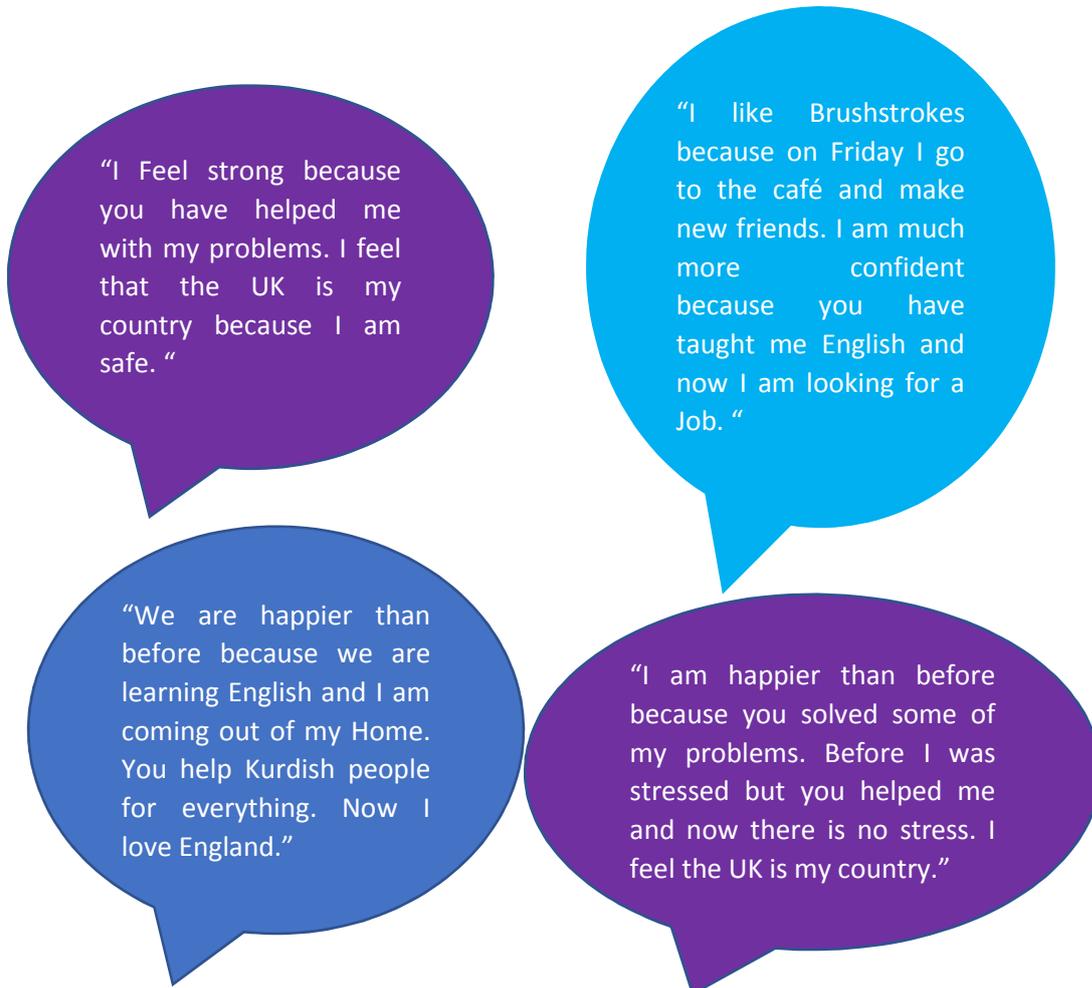
Our priorities in 2017/18

- Increasing our capacity to deliver ESOL
- Identify suitable space for the delivery of confidential advice, our resources and other services.
- Expanding our outreach offer through the training and recruitment of additional volunteer advisers and exploring options for delivering of advice from other venues.
- Developing a wider range of work on migrant health and ensuring we understand the impact of the NHS charging regulations on new migrants.
- Sustain our work with refugees and migrants in private sector accommodation and develop many peer housing mentors.
- Enhance our capacity to evidence new and emerging issues in migrant communities and make greater use of this to inform policy and service delivery.

Dave Newall

Project Manager Brushstrokes Community Project

Don't just take our word for it; this is what our service users have said in response to their contact with Brushstrokes:

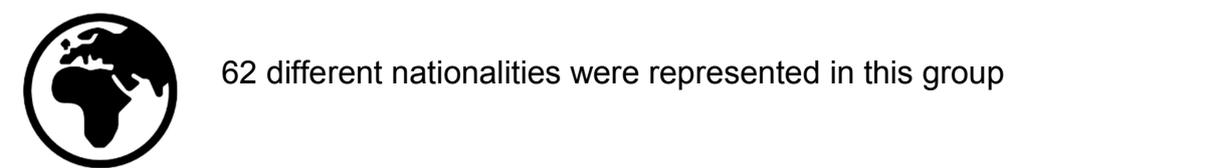


Data on new service users in 2016-17

We have chosen to highlight data on showing the support provided to new service users this year as this illustrates the diversity and additional demand placed on our resources and our space to deliver our services.

Sandwell remained the second largest area of asylum seeker dispersal in the West Midlands this year. National Insurance numbers data, showed increases in arrivals to Sandwell, 4805 National insurance numbers were issued this year to foreign nationals living in Sandwell. Romania, Italy, Poland, India and Bulgaria were among the largest groups of new arrivals.

Asylum seekers remain the largest group of our new service users and together with refugees they represented 61% of all new users. There has been a high level of demand for ESOL, Immigration advice, resources and general advice this year.

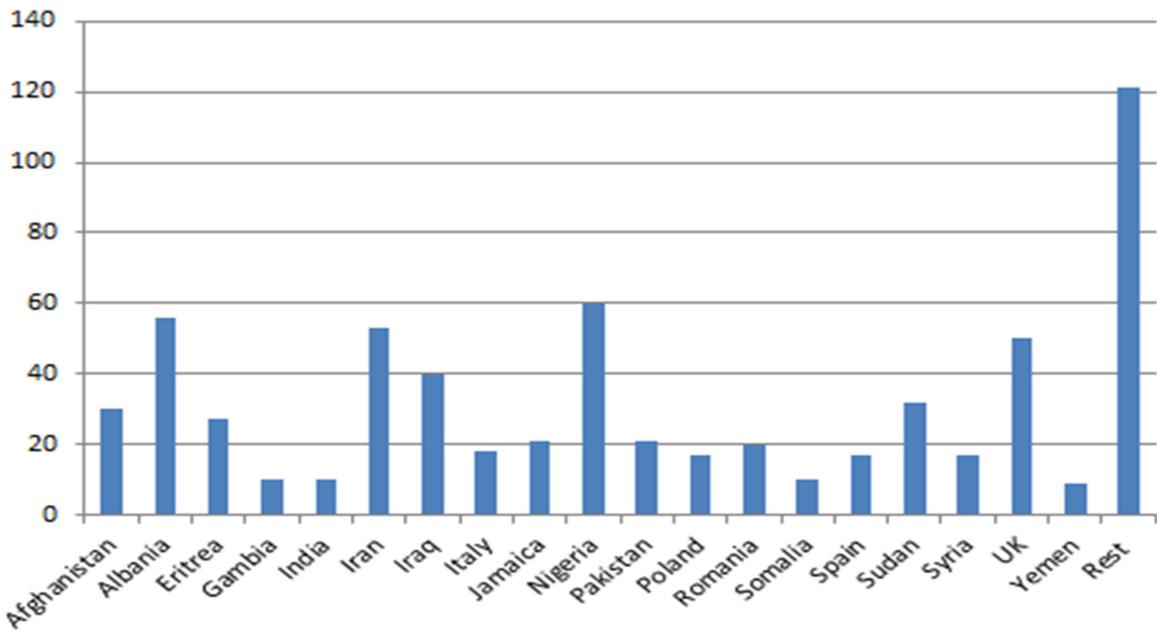


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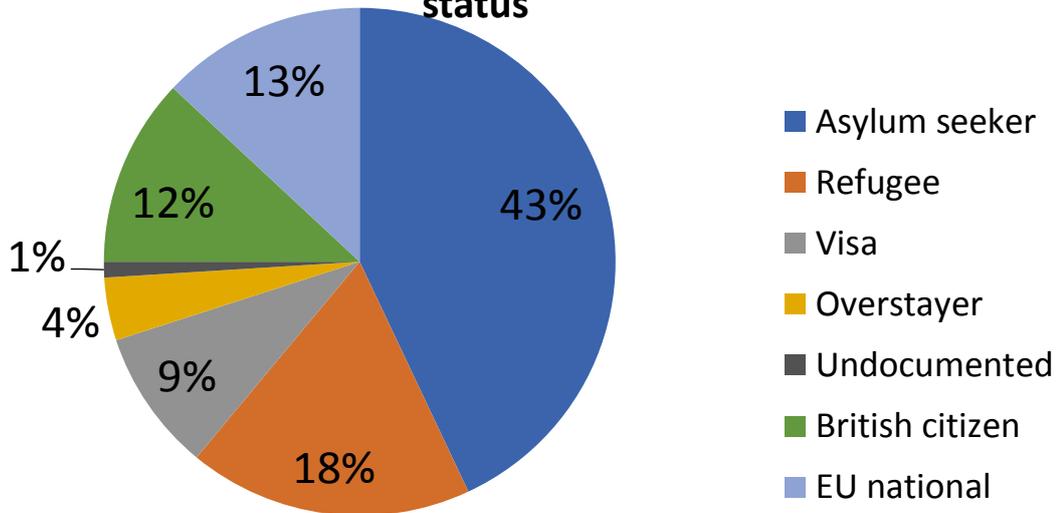
New service users came from the following countries:

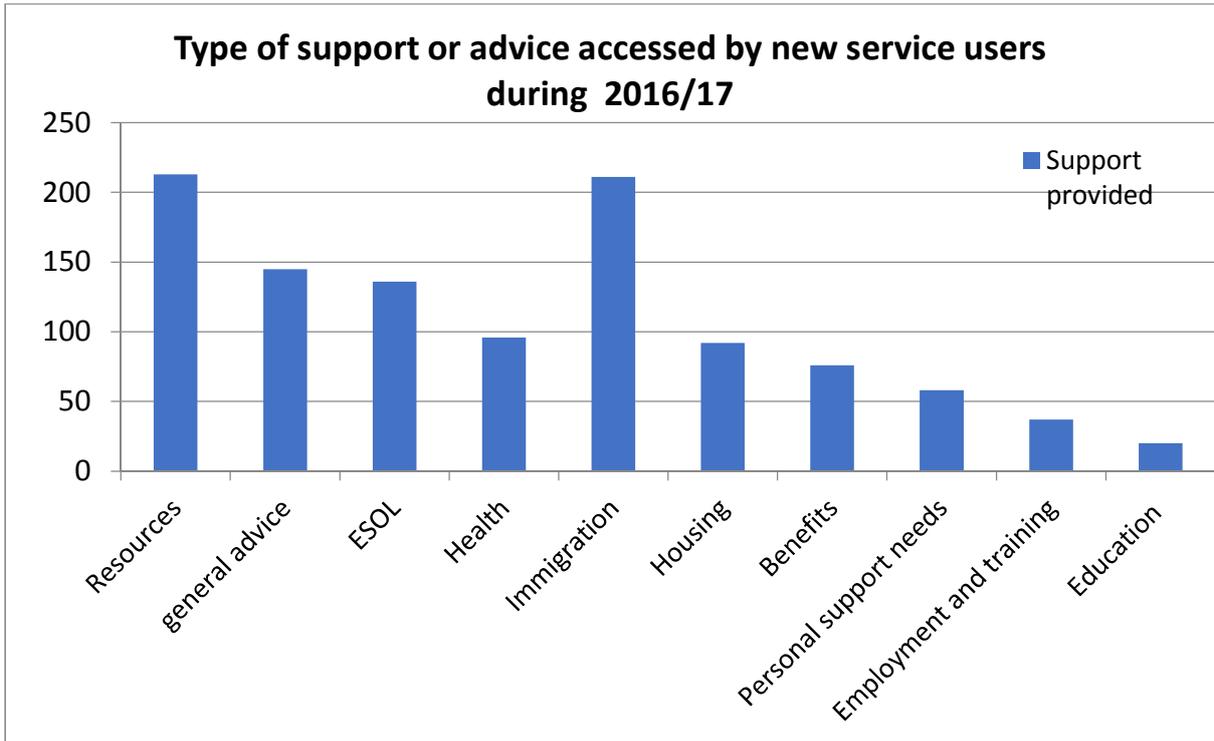
Albania	DRC	Libya	Sudan	Ukraine	Angola	Slovakia
Kenya	Spain	Georgia	Poland	UK	Malawi	Morocco
Mexico	Iran	Namibia	Iraq	Somalia	France	Syria
St Kitts	Mali	Portugal	Kuwait	Zimbabwe	Congo	Afghanistan
Italy	Egypt	Romania	China	Rwanda	Guinea	Mauritius
Gambia	Russia	Jamaica	Eritrea	Hungary	Liberia	Botswana
Ethiopia	Latvia	Vietnam	Bangladesh	Malaysia	Uganda	Ivory Coast
Pakistan	Turkey	South Africa	Bolivia	Sri Lanka	Yemen	Ghana
Nigeria	India	Tanzania	Netherlands	Cameroon		

Nationality of new Brushstrokes cases 2016/17



Brushstrokes new service users by immigration status

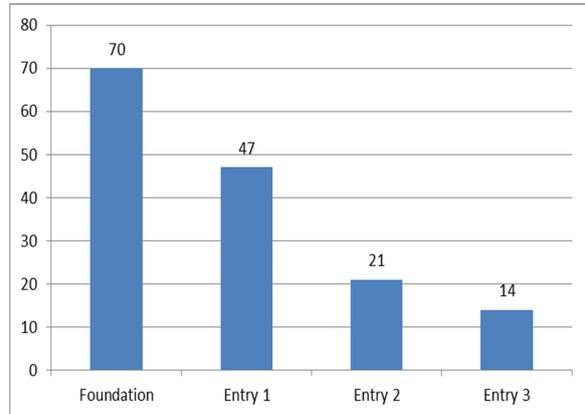






ESOL: Developing language, building integration

From September 2016 – June 2017 we have run 18 regular classes per week in the centre. This includes 1 Foundation class run by Sandwell College.



Since January 2017 we have held an additional beginners' class at Smethwick Baptist Church, this class accommodates 13 learners who are complete beginners. The greatest need is for English at a basic level, 46% of our learners are below Entry Level 1.



212 people have been in learning at Brushstrokes since September 2016.

152 are currently still in learning

76% of these are women



Brushstrokes learners country of origin

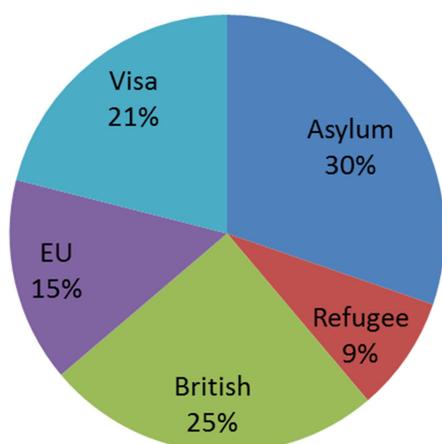
Afghanistan	36	Mexico	1
Albania	3	Nigeria	3
Angola	1	Pakistan	17
Bangladesh	1	Poland	1
Egypt	1	Romania	4
Eritrea	5	Russia	1
Gambia	1	Saudi Arabia	1
Ghana	1	Slovakia	1
Guinea	8	Somalia	3
Guinea Bissau	1	Sri Lanka	2
India	1	Sudan	13
Iran	5	Syria	3
Iraq (Kurdistan)	34	Turkey	1
Kosova	1	Yemen	1
Kuwait	1		

We have learners from 29 different countries with the highest numbers coming from Afghanistan and Kurdistan (Fig 1).

30% of learners are asylum seekers. We also have a number of ladies who have been in the country some time and who find the pace and level of learning at Brushstrokes suits them better than a college environment. This accounts in part, for the 25% of learners who are British citizens.

With increased numbers of people accessing Brushstrokes' services, classroom space is limited and we are currently looking for other available space in the area. We have close links with volunteer led classes at Bearwood Chapel, Thimblemill Library and The Hub in Victoria Park. Students from Bearwood Chapel have taken exams through Brushstrokes since 2015 and we also provide teaching and learning resources for our partner organisations

Brushstrokes learners' immigration status



We continue to build relationships with other organisations. The ESOL Forum is a new initiative to create a support network for ESOL practitioners in the voluntary sector has been set up by Helen Clare from City of

I am alone in my home but now I have more friends and my English is better.

Lamis

Sanctuary supported by Brushstrokes, St Chad's Sanctuary and Urban Devotion. Our first conference was held on 28th January at Carrs Lane Church and was a great success with 50 people attending. We hope to continue to build

on this network of support between volunteer led ESOL provision in Sandwell and Birmingham.

I went hospital in a taxi. Just I understand doctor and ask when I don't understand. I'm happy when I do things just me.

Bizheen

In March 2017, we were approached by The STEPS Family Learning Team at the Hollies to teach a class for parents. This has been very successful, with 18 mums and dads attending since April 2017.

Before I was shy. Now I am confident.

Bebe

Exam Results May 2016 – May 2017

Date	Skill	Level	Number of Passes
May 2016	Reading	Entry 1	16
		Entry 2	13
		Entry 3	10
Jun 2016	Speaking and Listening	Pre Entry	9
		Entry 1	16
		Entry 2	11
Dec 2016	Writing	Entry 3	12
		Entry 1	2
		Entry 2	3
Feb 2017	Reading	Entry 1	5
Mar 2017	Reading	Entry 1	4
		Entry 2	10
		Entry 3	6
	Writing	Entry 3	1
		Total	118 exam passes

Further reading exams are planned for 15th June and Speaking & Listening exams for July 4th and 5th.



In September 2016 ESOL certificates were presented by Teresa Clements. Learners and their families came together to celebrate their achievements and student, Gul Mohammed, thanked our wonderful volunteer teachers.

We have 10 volunteer teachers and 6 classroom assistants. In May this year we held a training session for volunteers in which Helen Booth from St Chad's Sanctuary talked about strategies for teaching reading to pre-literate learners. There are very few resources for



teachers who teach people who have had no formal schooling and who are learning to read and write for the first time. Teachers found the training extremely useful and took away ideas to help their own learners.

When I go parent's day for my son I can understand.

Dhurime



Volunteer teacher, Lakshmi Sukumaran, has completed her Diploma in Education and Training through Worcester University. She used Brushstrokes for her teaching hours and ESOL Coordinator, Jane Alsop, has been her workplace mentor. Lakshmi won a student achievement award. During the past year at Brushstrokes Lakshmi has taught Entry 1 and Entry 3 and a short ESOL for Emotional Health course.

Case Study 1

Y is a 30-year-old asylum seeker from Afghanistan. She is profoundly deaf and only communicates with her mother. They have developed a sign language of their own that only they can understand. Y wants to learn British Sign Language (BSL) and learn to communicate with people in the deaf community in the UK. As an asylum seeker, it was difficult to access support for her locally. She attended ESOL classes with her mother and father and although watched what was going on was not able to participate. As her teacher, I communicated with vague gestures and facial expressions but she wasn't interacting with me or other members of the class. Social media to the rescue. I contacted a Facebook friend who is a BSL interpreter in London. She put me onto a BSL interpreter in Birmingham who was prepared to come out and meet Y, her mum and myself and do a basic BSL class with us. Tariq Mahmood is a Muslim BSL interpreter who is in great demand. He gave up two afternoons of paid work to come and help us begin to learn the alphabet and numbers in BSL. Now Y and I practise the BSL alphabet and basic words together and slowly we are communicating. Her family have just got leave to remain so we can now get Y more support and next month Y and her mum are going to the Sign Café in West Bromwich to practise their new skills. Not only can Y make her life in the UK but she has already become less isolated and will soon be able to communicate and make friends.

Case Study 2

N came from Pakistan to be with her husband who became violent towards her. In 2011, she found herself in one room in a hostel on her own with two young children and struggling to communicate in English. N had no schooling in Pakistan so was unable to read and write in her first language, Urdu. I visited N at the hostel and for the first few weeks she learned how to identify and write the alphabet. When she gained her leave to remain and moved into a house, she came to classes at Brushstrokes with extra one to one help from a volunteer teacher. Although vulnerable and with low self-esteem, N was determined to learn to read and write in English. She came to class regularly and gradually started to put sounds together to form words. She joined the Sandwell College class at Brushstrokes and when her youngest child started school, she registered for Sandwell College in West Bromwich where she could now hold her own with other ESOL students.

Fast forward to 2016: N has passed her driving theory test and is about to take her driving test. She came to work club at Brushstrokes and learnt how to apply for work using the computer. She found herself some work experience in a greengrocers and a shoe shop in order to have some experience on her CV. She registered with an employment agency and currently works as a kitchen assistant in a local school. She is more confident and no longer asks for help to make phone calls. Next week she will be taking her first ever reading exam in English.

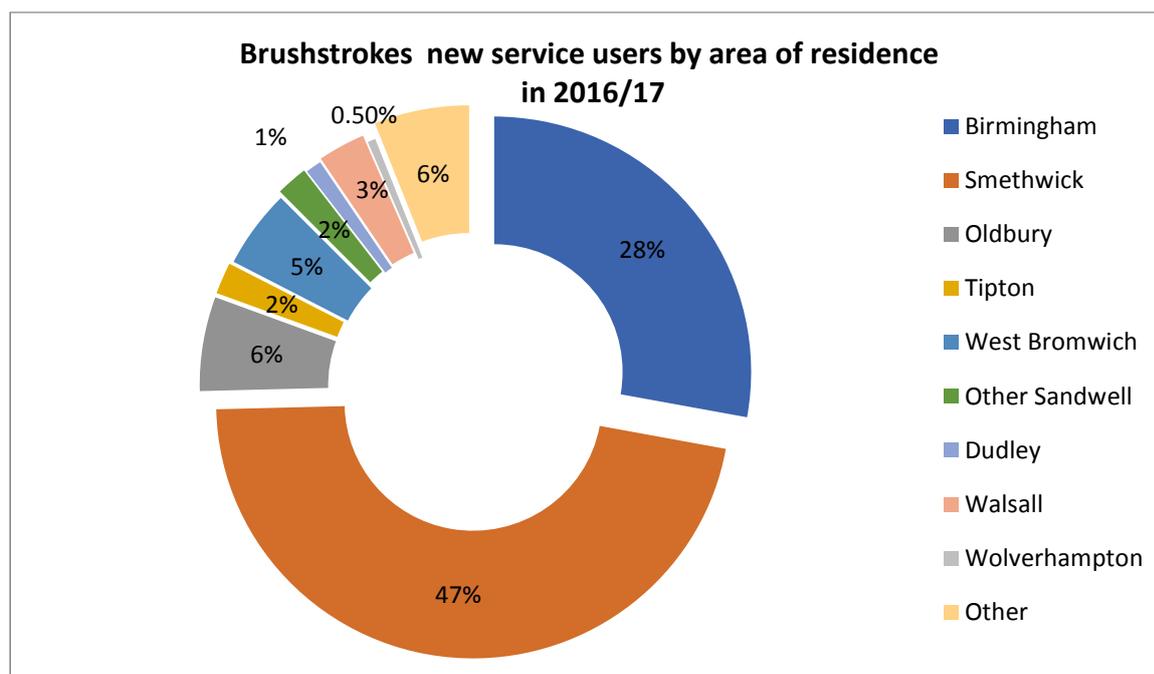
Outreach and advice : Welcoming the stranger



The demand for advice and support continues to grow as the number of asylum seekers in asylum support accommodation rose during last year. Outreach and home visiting remain central to the support we provide. We endeavour to visit every newly dispersed asylum seeker who are housed in Sandwell and extend our visiting to parts of West Birmingham for other vulnerable migrants.

As our service user data highlights, our advice provision extends to refugees, EU migrants, individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds, individuals who have come to join family or the UK Citizens in the Sandwells' existing BME communities, living in Sandwell, West Birmingham and Dudley.

Whilst Smethwick remains the area with the largest number of asylum seekers, the chart below shows where our new service users were living this year. 62% of our new clients live in Sandwell with 28% living in Birmingham.



As a project we remain distinctive in providing an outreach service that is proactive in seeking to find new arrivals, provide a welcome and introduction to Brushstrokes and works with individuals to identify and help them address their aspirations and needs.

Through outreach and advice we have supported people with the following issues

- Asylum support issues
- Accommodation problems
- Access to a GP and signposting or referral to other health services
- Benefit problems
- Housing information and advice
- Accessing school places
- Grants or referrals for household goods
- Signposting to other organisations
- Orientation to the local area
- Referring to work club and other organisations providing employment, training and volunteering opportunities
- Responding to destitution

The outreach team has continued to visit and befriend people in their homes or over the telephone to meet the growing need. We continued to develop our telephone befriending provision this year, and will be supporting this more fully in the coming year as demand increases. Referrals for befriending support came from GPs, mental health support workers, children's centres and teaching staff.

One of the challenges this year has been an increase in numbers of individuals presenting as destitute or with No Recourse to Public funds. We continue to work with other organisations and local authorities to address the needs of families in these circumstances and work with Fatima House, Refugee Action, Asylum Help and The Children's Society to respond to these needs.

This year we developed a weekly outreach sessions in conjunction with Our Lady of Lourdes in Old Hill. One of the challenges those in the asylum system face, due to the limited availability of accommodation in Smethwick, is the distance they need to travel if they want to come to Brushstrokes. There is no local provision of advice for asylum seekers in Dudley, which might be more accessible for service users in the Old Hill, and Craddley Heath. The outreach and home visiting provision during this period has provided greater accessibility as well as supporting the development of a more local response to welcome refugees and asylum seekers.

Our service users have also benefited this year from the additional advice provision through Parvinder from the Sandwell Consortium. This service has been able to support individuals with a range of more complex benefits issues. We have also been fortunate to have Mandy from Citizens Advice delivering the Click start project once a week. The project provides support to individuals to develop their online skills assisting them to be able to manage electronic claims, improve employability and improve money management.

Housing: A place to call home



Supporting migrants in private sector housing

It is the final year of our Migrant Voice: Migrant Housing solutions project. Funded by Barrow Cadbury Trust, the project aims to provide advocacy and support to migrants who are living in or looking for accommodation in private rented housing. Apart from supporting migrants to secure or sustain tenancies in the private sector the project aims to enable migrants in Sandwell to have a collective voice on housing issues. We are working to ensure this voice can help improve and develop best practice and build confidence among migrants about accessing private rented accommodation.

We have continued to work closely with Sandwell Council and strengthened our engagement with landlords, attending the Sandwell Landlords forum and using this as an opportunity highlight issues which our service users face and build relationship.

Referrals have come from our existing outreach work, from health visitors , social workers or self referrals from with the community.



We have worked with 41 households representing 152 individuals



105 individuals were EU nationals

33 were refugees

11 had Discretionary leave

3 had No Recourse to Public Funds



Over 20 households were supported to find private sector housing

Two Households were helped where a section 21 orders had been issued and our intervention enabled them to remain in the property.



78% of clients lived in Sandwell

19% lived in Birmingham

3% lived in Walsall

Through our joint work with tenants and landlords we were able to hold a network meeting in December. The event created space for landlords and migrants to talk about the issues which concerned them. The discussion created a greater level of understanding and identified issues which we have been able to take forward with both parties.

Landlords raised concerns about the fear of tenants subletting properties, concerns about rent shortfalls as the benefit cap took affect and the impact of the right to rent legislation. Tenants were concerned about the level of agency fees, difficulting understanding their rights due to language barriers and the problems securing accommodation for those who were on welfare benefits.

We have provided the following range of support to tenants this year:

- Help with welfare benefits, tax credit and housing benefit applications.
- Support where section 21 notices have been served.
- Applying for grants for furniture and white goods.
- Help identifying accommodation in the private sector.
- Assisting individuals to resolve repairs and rent arrears issues with their landlord.
- Post tenancy support with energy efficiency and budgeting skills.

Several issues have emerged from the project which Brushstrokes will continue to work with existing partners and monitor and respond to in the coming months.

- **Impact of Brexit:** The uncertainty around Brexit and the position of European Union nationals once the UK leaves the European Union. Some service users have commented about the reluctance of some landlords and agents to rent their property to EU nationals. We will seek to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this issue and the wider impact on housing and homelessness as the project ends.
- **Tenant education:** The need for more extensive education about the rights and responsibilities for tenants when renting through the private sector remains. Individuals, particularly those who have more limited ability to read English, remain uncertain about the rights and responsibilities involved in renting in the private sector.
- **Perceptions of private rented housing:** Some clients remain resistant to accepting properties in the private sector because they consider them insecure, preferring instead to wait for council property, which puts them at increased risk of homelessness. This can also place pressure of local authorities to accommodate them temporarily.
- **Illegal evictions or harassment of tenants:** Increased incidents of illegal evictions and harassment of tenants have been coming through to the project. We have been working with the relevant local authority to tackle these cases and will continue to monitor, particularly with respect to Brexit.

Helan and Lukes case study illustrates the holistic nature of the service which Brushstrokes provides and how support with housing issues has led to wider benefit for the family.

Helan and Luke have 5 children, Luke is employed part time. They have been in the UK since 2015, are EU nationals and live in a private rented house in Sandwell. In February 2017 Helan referred herself to us asked for help with landlord who was refusing to do any repairs. The biggest issue was with boiler which wasn't working and pipes were not covered, causing hazards in the property for the children.

We contacted with landlord who refused to carry out the repairs, as a result we reported the case to local authority who took the appropriate action. By May all the issues had been sorted and Helan was very happy with our service, she says: "last time I got problem with my landlord and Brushstrokes helped me. When I have problem they help me."

H keeps visiting our office for work club and she is actively looking for work and attending ESOL classes. Her view of the service she has received shows her satisfaction, "I can say they are good. I'm happy with the help I got from them"

Sara's case shows how we have been able to resolve her housing issues and ensure the building blocks were in place to enable her to have a sustainable tenancy.

Sara is a single mother of 1 child, unemployed, and a refugee in UK since 2007. She is very vulnerable having experienced Domestic Violence and has limited ability to speak English.

In April 2016 Sara referred herself to us asking for help to find property for her and her little son. The flat above the shop she had been living was in very bad state of disrepair. Her landlord had to ask all tenants to move out in order to carry out repair work to the whole block.

We found Sara a 2 bedroom house through our accredited landlord. We arranged viewing of the property with landlord and client and at week later Sara with our full assistance moved in to new property. We helped her to understand her tenancy agreement, her rights and responsibilities, changing address for all benefits, transferring bills, making housing benefits claim and arranging payments made directly to landlord to prevent falling in to arrears. We also applied for Discretionary Housing Payment from the local authority and Sara was able to receive a new washing machine.

We've been doing follow up every month for six months and Sara was doing very well and didn't require any help or support at that time. A year after our support ended we contacted her to evaluate the support we had provided. Sara was very happy with all service and support we have provided which ensured that she was able to maintain her tenancy by herself. She also reports that she has a positive relationship with her landlord.

Refugee resettlement

The Refugee Homelessness Prevention Pathway provides vital support to households in Sandwell who receive a positive decision on their asylum claim and need to move on from UKVI (UK Visa and Immigration) support. This work continues to demonstrate the benefits of a partnership approach between organisations to address the needs of refugees, and we are grateful to Sandwell Council for providing funding to enable this work to continue until March 2018.

Feedback from a council officer at our last review meeting highlighted the benefit the project had made to her team. They commented on how refugees presenting or referred to the team nowadays have their national insurance numbers and benefit claims either in process or payment. This is in stark contrast to the position before the project started and makes a big difference to their work.

Our advice workers contact each refugee who receives a positive decision as soon as we are notified. This early contact is designed to prevent individuals and families presenting as homeless on the day they have been moved out of their G4S asylum accommodation. Housing options, help apply for national insurance numbers and relevant benefits as well as support to secure household items are offered at the initial stage of the process. Working with the councils' housing team the housing needs of families are assessed and the process of identifying and securing accommodation can begin. The project continues to provide ongoing support for up to 6 months for those refugees who require this. Work can include help with budgeting and assistance with employment and training.

Between 02.8.16 and 15.3.17 we offered support to:



70 Households (126 individuals)



46 Single adults



24 families.

One of the main challenges for single refugees remains the limited housing options for them in Sandwell. We continue to work closely with a few housing associations to explore housing options for our single refugees, it is a shame that for most of them the accommodation which is most often secured is in Birmingham. As an area we are potentially missing out on the range of qualifications, skills and experience that the refugee community hold.

The start of the USE-IT project¹ which Brushstrokes is a partner in has highlighted the numbers of refugee and migrant health professionals with overseas health qualifications in the Soho and Victoria, Summerfield and Ladywood areas. The number of individuals identified since March with skills that could directly benefit the NHS has taken partners by surprise.

The difference the Refugee Homelessness Prevention Pathway makes for refugees is also recognised by those organisations we work with and is illustrated in this recent case.

Case Study

A and T have recently been granted asylum in the UK for 5 years. They are a father and adult son from Syria. We initially met them during our outreach visits. When they received their positive decision we invited them into the office to help with finding accommodation, apply for their national insurance numbers, applying for benefits and helping with setting up bank accounts. From the first visit to the office it became very clear that the family had additional needs. A has a serious illness and is very poorly. So, as well as the help we normally give to our Pathway service users we have had to fight for disability benefits for A, apply for family reunification for the remaining family members to come to the UK, liaise with housing to get appropriate housing and support and meet with them more regularly than normal to support the family during this difficult time.

A and T are so very grateful for all the help Brushstrokes has given them.

Sandwell Council staff have also congratulated Brushstrokes for the work with A and T saying ‘...Thanks so much for the help you have provided. I’d never heard of Brushstrokes, well done for doing such a challenging job.’

¹ USE-IT is an EU funded project aimed at unlocking social and economic innovation together in the Soho and Victoria, Summerfield and Ladywood areas. It is a partnership which aims to build on the impact of the new Midlands Metropolitan Hospital in partnership between Sandwell and Birmingham Local Authorities, Birmingham Universities and a range of other organisations to identify skills, develop community research and support the creation of social enterprises to enable local people to benefit from the investment and regeneration in the Soho and Victoria, Summerfield, Winson Green and Ladywood area.

Health : Creating opportunities for better health



Health and wellbeing play an important role in the ability of new arrivals to play an active role in their local community. Good health and wellbeing is likely to influence an individual's capacity to improve their socio-economic circumstances which in turn affects the community they live in.

Other sections of this report have highlighted how Brushstrokes is working with its service users to address the wider determinants of health, those factors which indirectly can affect individuals' health and wellbeing. We do this by providing opportunities for individuals to improve their language, address their housing needs, assist with benefits or budgeting and creating opportunities for new skills and experience through volunteering and referral to other organisations.

This year has seen us continue to deliver work to improve the health of new communities through the STEP Network coordinated by Sandwell Consortium. A number of events have been held with new and existing service users to improve their understanding of the NHS and how to make appropriate use of NHS services. Our existing contact with new arrivals has enabled us to run sessions where health professionals delivering NHS health checks, TB awareness and testing, Sexual health and Drug and Alcohol services have been present. This has created opportunity for new arrivals to understand a wider range of health issues and the support and services that are available in Sandwell and West Birmingham.

We have continued to support new arrivals to identify and register with a GP and provided safe sleep information for expectant mothers who have accessed a baby box from us.

For some of our service users the traumatic experiences that have caused their migration or circumstances that occurred since their arrival, e.g. Domestic violence, have resulted in poor mental health. We have been fortunate through the Sandwell Early Help Innovation Fund to have a series of counselling sessions provided on site throughout this year. Access to counselling and other mental health support remains a challenge for recent migrants. This is complicated by language barriers and cultural perceptions of mental health, which make it more difficult for some individuals to seek assistance.

Through our casework we have seen a number of individuals who have been charged for NHS treatment, due to the changes from the Overseas visitors NHS charging regulations. We have also been able to resolve cases where asylum seekers have not received their HC2 exemption form whilst in UKVI asylum accommodation. We will continue to collect evidence and provide support to individuals affected by these changes this year.

Work club: Identifying skills and providing support



Access to employment is a key aspect of integration. Through the provision of ESOL and volunteering opportunities individuals have been able to improve their work readiness this year. Since September 2016 the provision of a weekly work club has supported 63 individuals. Refugees, EU migrants and individuals who have come to the UK to join family have been making use of this service seeking help with writing CVs, Job search and developing the skills and capacity to complete applications and write cover letters.

Referrals come from the Job Centre, other community organisations and other Brushstrokes projects, such as our Homelessness Prevention Pathway.

Weekly attendance at work club ranges from 5 to 10 at present.

We have been grateful of the support from the **National Careers Service** and from the **Connected Community Foundation** in work club over the past 6 months. In the next 6 months we hope to established another work club session per week. The value of work club being part of the wider range of services Brushstrokes provides is illustrated by some of our service users who say,

“I feel more confident I can open the page and put in my codes and apply for jobs” (Imjad)

“You change my CV. I got a job. I am very happy in my job.” (Parveen)

“I’m doing some temp work with an agency. You help me get job. I go out and speak to people and that makes me more confident.” (Nabia)

“Your help with my CV helped me get my job in the NHS. You can’t imagine how happy I am” (Margaret)

Community Café : Making a meal of community cohesion



As a Place of Welcome our Friday community café has been a great success, far exceeding our expectations that we would have 30 individuals attending per week. Our menus have been expanded, from providing a Jacket potato, to a selection of 2 hot meals and dessert, and over the last year we have served over 2800 hot meals.



The Café is a great place of welcome serving approximately 46% of meals to refugees and asylum seekers with the remaining 54% to individuals who are homeless or who are local residents. People are coming together to share food, make

friendships and share in an expression of community cohesion. It is through the simple act of sharing a meal that barriers and preconceptions about 'others' are being broken down.

Inviting our neighbours and local residents to our special events, such as sharing food from around the world at our **Interfaith Lunch, Big Lunch, Christmas lunch, St Patrick's Day Lunch** and **Easter Celebrations**,



has created further opportunities to develop a more cohesive local community this year.



2887 hot meals served through the community café



46% of those attending the Community Café were asylum seekers

54% where either homeless or local residents



10 of our staff and volunteers involved in the Café successfully completed their Level 2 Food Safety in Catering course.

The Café has created the opportunity for our volunteers to develop and enhance their skills whilst they give their time serving others in practical expressions of kindness and welcome.



Volunteering : Creating space to learn , give and grow

The work of Brushstrokes would not be possible without the fantastic contribution of the time and talent of our volunteers. Through developing links with local agencies such as Sandwell Volunteer Centre, Smethwick Library, Smethwick Church Action Network and being a member of Together Smethwick volunteer Hub we have received over 90 volunteering enquiries this year. However, our service users remain one of the main sources of volunteer enquiries. We currently have 38 volunteers.

“Volunteering with Brushstrokes has helped with my confidence and English and I am now looking forward to applying for work”. (Hawar)

Volunteers are involved in all aspects of the work of Brushstrokes from helping with our resources, befriending, outreach, ESOL, administration and the community café.

All volunteers receive an induction and through volunteer reviews and development training needs are identified.

Volunteers have completed a range of training courses this year linked to the project areas they are involved in. These include the Level 2 Food Safety in Catering course, a 6 week befriending and mentoring course, financial skills training and a wide range of in house courses providing support with IT, administration and catering.

On a positive note this year saw three of our volunteers leave to take up employment and one leave to take up full time education. Highlighting the benefit that volunteering can bring for some individuals in developing the skills, confidence and experience to enable them to successfully enter employment.

We also recognise the role which volunteers play as advocates in communities for our service users and also the fundraising work they do on behalf of the organisation and its service users. Whether donating food, clothing and other resources or doing specific fundraising activities, this makes a real difference helping us to address specific needs and maintain its work.



The impact of volunteering for Brushstrokes can be seen in the following figures.



38 volunteers at brushstrokes

13 volunteers living in Smethwick

9 volunteers who are refugees or asylum seekers



2511 hours of volunteering and 347 hours of student involvement.



Volunteer and student contribution to the organisation this year equates to over £20,000²

² Whilst impossible to put a real value on quality and dedication of our volunteers work, we have reached this figure using an equivalent of the minimum wage for our student placements and over 25 yr. old volunteers.

Resources : Simple acts of kindness



Brushstrokes provides food, clothing, baby equipment, baby packs and household items for those in need. The volume of food provided to asylum seekers and those with no recourse to public funds has increased this year by 75%. We are grateful to all those organisations and individuals who have provided donations of food, finance, clothing and baby equipment over the past year. These simple acts of kindness and generosity make such a difference to all who receive them.

Our resource provision this year:



4064 food bags to service users



319 referrals to Smethwick Food Bank



550 Clothing packs



71 baby packs provided to expectant mothers



176 individuals received baby equipment

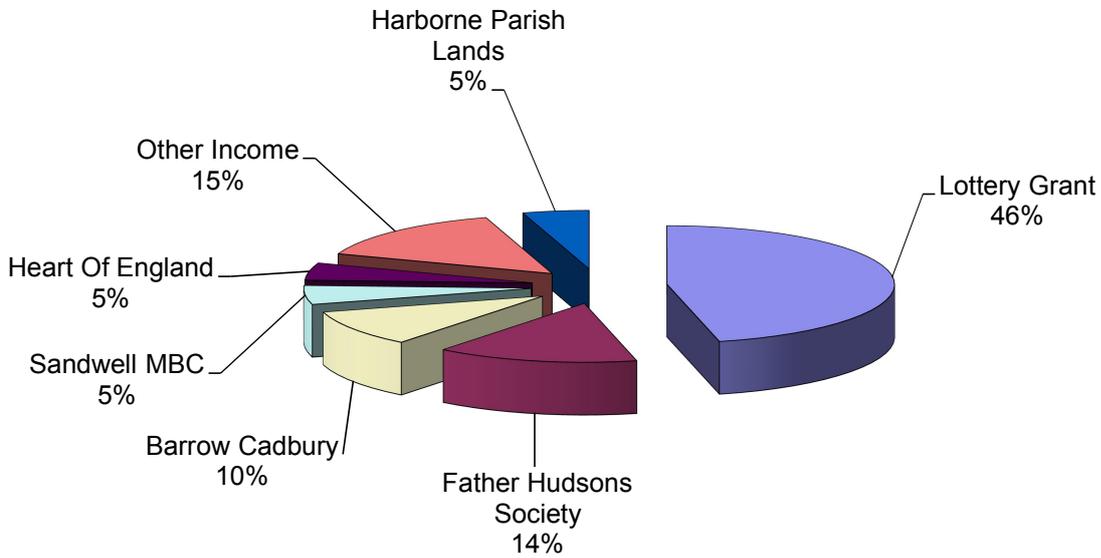


84 sets of toys provided to children of asylum seekers
320 children received a present at Christmas

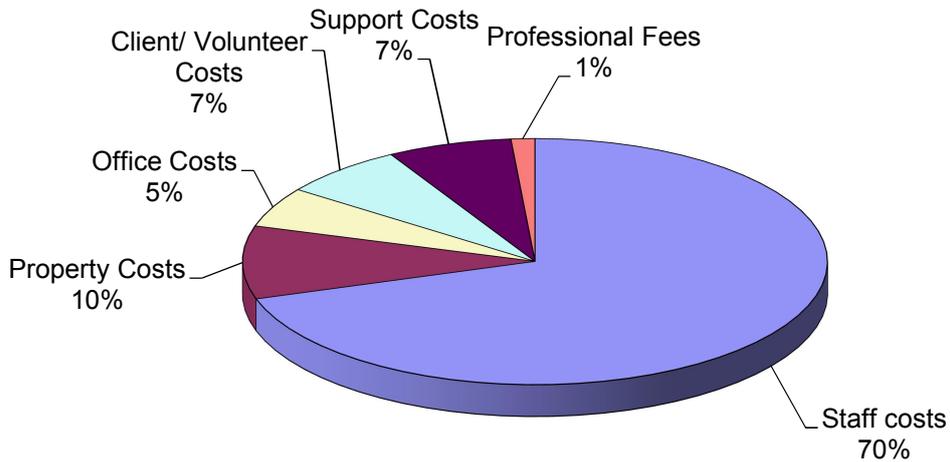


249 provisions of household essentials

**Brushstrokes Income for the Year Ended 31st
March 2017
Total £186,744.00**



**Brushstrokes Expenditure for the Year Ended 31st
March 2017
Total £233,187.00**



³ Note: The shortfall between expenditure and income this year has been covered from Brushstrokes unrestricted funds.

Brushstrokes would not have been able to deliver our range of services without the support of our funders.

We would like to express our thanks to the following :

- Barrow Cadbury Trust
- The Big Lottery – Reaching Communities
- Caritas Archdiocese of Birmingham
- Father Hudson’s Care
- Harborne Parish Lands
- The Heart of England Community Foundation – New beginnings
- The Peoples Health Trust
- Sandwell Consortium – STEP Network
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council – Refugee Homelessness prevention pathway
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council – Early Help Innovation fund

Donations have been received this year from:

- Parishes, religious orders, schools and organisations within the Archdiocese of Birmingham
- Other faith communities
- Foodbanks in Sandwell and the Black Country
- Asda Foundation
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- Tesco Fareshare food cloud

We would also like to give a special thanks to all those individuals who have donated finance, food and resources to us this year.



If you would like further information about Brushstrokes, would like to volunteer or support our work in any way please contact us at:
Info@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk
 Call us on 0121 565 2234
 Or call in at St Phillips Centre, Watt Street, Smethwick, B66 3DA
 If you would like any further information about this report please contact Dave Newall, Project manager: david@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk