

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

Sept 2021



Volunteer Family Barbecue

THANK YOU



With the lifting of Covid Restrictions we were able to organise a Barbecue Party for our wonderful family of volunteers. The **Staff of Brushstrokes** wanted to celebrate and make sure our volunteers and their families had a lovely day. All the staff agreed to help out and provided the food for the day. With the risk assessment completed, tasks allocated, two sets of burners provided, cooks in situ and music playing all was ready to welcome past and present volunteers back together at Brushstrokes.

With over fifty people attending it was a real pleasure to be able to meet up with everyone again after such a long period away and it didn't even rain.

This was our opportunity to thank our family of volunteers for all their support. There were many mentions of appreciation especially for those volunteers who have been helping throughout **all** the lockdowns. We wish to thank also those of you who have volunteered throughout this pandemic and although we were unable to present you with a token of appreciation you all deserve praise for the wonderful work you do.

Brushstrokes is blessed with a wonderful team of volunteers and staff and looking around the party it was humbling to see you all gathered and reminded me of the amazing help you give to the people we support.

You truly do make a difference to their lives!

Looking forward to seeing you.

Martin McNally
Volunteer Coordinator



Staff & Volunteers BBQ



Mary Tomlinson



Parveen Akhtar



Paul Beech



Anne Tudor



Roy Gardiner



Pictured above: Volunteers Receiving Thank You Medals for volunteering continuously throughout the pandemic.





New lottery funded V.O.I.C.E project starts this month



Brushstrokes Community Project is thrilled to announce it has received a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to support the local community. The V.O.I.C.E project, starting on 1st September, will support some of the most vulnerable people in Sandwell, west Birmingham and surrounds, including refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. The project will enable individuals from new communities to have a Voice, get Online, Integrate, build Community, and improve Employability.

The effects of Covid, Brexit and restricted access to other local services mean demand for Brushstrokes' help has rocketed in the last year. Our provision of emergency support has more than doubled, with people needing assistance to avoid becoming homeless and destitute, to move into employment and develop digital skills.

Esther Makama, Chair of Brushstrokes Service User Panel says: "As the Chair of the Brushstrokes Service User Panel I am so pleased the Big Lottery are funding our project. It will help give refugees like me a voice and make real change to peoples lives."

Built around the acronym V.O.I.C.E., the project will enable individuals to:

V – have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. The people who turn to Brushstrokes for support have expertise forged by their unique life experiences. Brushstrokes will help these voices to get heard at local, regional and national levels, champion the needs of new communities, and provide opportunities for people to have a say in issues that impact them.

O – get online. Improving IT skills will help people build their confidence, develop their language skills, access information and support, and reduce isolation.

I – integrate. Brushstrokes' advice and support services provide information, advice and guidance on multiple issues that help people integrate into their communities. This includes support with health, education, specialist asylum support, and accessing local services.

C – build community. Brushstrokes' values are to provide welcome to all and to ensure people in need can access the support they need. Since the charity was founded, it has offered a welcome to everyone in the community and has been a place where people from any background can find a warm welcome. The V.O.I.C.E. project will support people to develop new activities, groups and organisations that reflect their ideas and allow people to get together for socialization, learning and community. It will enable people to build the community they want to see.

E – improve people's employability through targeted personal support. Brushstrokes' staff and volunteers provide training and advice that enables people to develop their skills and confidence so they can move into employment.

Brushstrokes project manager, Dave Newall says: "People feel alone with no one to turn to. They've been significantly affected by Covid and are really struggling to cope. Additionally, they need support to improve their English, skills, and understanding to adjust in the UK, become independent, and fulfil their potential. We are thrilled to receive such an important grant for V.O.I.C.E., as it means we can be there to help people get through this crisis and support them into the future. "



Appreciations



Tekeste arrived in the UK from Eritrea on 16th July 2019 and was granted ILR in April 2020. Tekeste first registered with Brushstrokes 3 months after he first arrived in the UK and has received advice and support from our Advice team as well as resources. Tekeste states "The help and support I received from Lukano and the team at Brushstrokes changed my life and I am very happy. I always advise my friends to visit Brushstrokes as they always help." Tekeste now works with EPO Logistic which is part of the Amazon group and is in the process of securing permanent accommodation.



Mr Mohammed Tahir says, "before I come to Brushstrokes Community Project", "I did not know anything about my case", "I was worried about my case what will home office do", "how to start case and to get documents and legal representation as a solicitor". "How can I start my studies and about medical Hc2 form", "how to apply for financial support".

"Everything Mr Lukano has done for me I am very grateful and thankful to him he's one of the nicest gentlemen and talks to me with respect".

"He has helped me and now I'm very happy with my case, finally I have a solicitor to represent me".



Kocher and her family are Brushstroke's regular service users, and after years of patiently waiting for decision of their asylum and immigration claim, they were finally granted 5 years Leave to Remain (Refugee) in the UK.

Despite her extremely limited English and complex health issues, she continued to persistently attend ESOL classes at Brushstrokes and her English language lowly but gradually improved, and she's now able to communicate well.

As the family were on Section 95 Asylum Support (subsistence and accommodation), they routinely accessed food parcels from Brushstrokes and sometimes delivered to them at home. When asked what help they received from Brushstrokes, she responded,

"Brushstrokes are and will for ever remain my family, they helped me with my asylum and immigration issue, they found me a solicitor, registered me with a GP, they read my letters and helped in contacting Migrant Help, they referred me to the local MP and a lot more, the list is endless! I feel at home when I am at Brushstrokes'. I cannot thank them enough, but especially Lukano, Jane, Lucy, Hawar and staff and volunteers at Brushstrokes, I have no words to thank them, because they gave us a new life".

When asked about her hopes for the future, Kocher commented 'I want my kids to learn English, to study and for their future to be good.'

Her youngest son, having improved his English spoke positively of the support he received from Brushstrokes commented that '.....Brushstrokes helped me with my travel pass to go to school and without them I wouldn't have been able to attend my classes regularly.....'. I thank them all for helping me with my family, thank you Brushstrokes.....'

Lukano Omunson



Irene Hansen

Our lovely Irene Hansen , Irene volunteers at Brushstrokes. Irene makes time to help with the resources she goes above and beyond sorting out the clothes donated, she is caring and very energetic.

Thank you for the amazing job you do on Saturday's , you are an important part of the team.

“Volunteers not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.”
 “You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give.”
“Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain loving one another.”

“Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in”.

New advisors

We'd like to introduce Omid, a Refugee Support Worker at [Brushstrokes Sandwell](#). He received support from Brushstrokes to take his Occupational English Test (OET) and now supports refugees that are settling in the area. Omid writes;

It has been a year and a half that I am living in the UK. I used to work as a doctor (heart specialist), and university lecturer in Afghanistan. When I came to the UK I heard about the Brushstrokes community project, which helps overseas doctors and nurses to pass the language exam (OET, IELTS). I sent them an email and they allocated me to OET classes and fortunately, I have passed my OET exam.

Currently, I am preparing to pass my medical exam.

I have started to work with Brushstrokes (Afghan resettlement Project). We help Afghan people that they worked with the British government. We help them to resettle in their house and familiarise the local community, law and home safety, registration with GP, Dentist, and Optician. Our work is ongoing with these families developing a personal integration plan that includes help to access ESOL, claim benefits, access employment , IT skills and training.



Omid Khyber



Nasratullah Popalzia

A big congratulations to Nasratullah on your new role as Refugee Support Worker! On behalf of the staff and management, we would like to welcome you to the team. We are delighted and excited about working as a team, its great to have you with us. Warmest welcome!



Sonia Stranger

During the first lockdown, we lost many learners in the ESOL department due to the fact that they were unable to access lessons online. This was for many reasons but one of them was their IT skill level. So, I am delighted to be appointed to the post of digital skills advisor. I hope to help our students to feel able to access online lessons independently and our other clients to feel more confident to use IT in their everyday lives .



Anna Lockley-Scott

We are delighted to have Anna as an Advice and family Support Worker joining our staff team having previously served as a volunteer at Brushstrokes. On behalf of all the members and the management, we would like to extend our warmest welcome and good wishes!

The Afghan refugee situation has exposed what's wrong with the proposed Nationality and Borders Bill

Salman Mirza, MV's Birmingham Network Worker



WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER, 2021

Escaping for your life is never going to be a neat, orderly affair, where you can carry all your evidence with you or travel via conventional routes. This has been starkly illustrated by events in Afghanistan over the last month. Even UK passport holders are stuck in Afghanistan.

Yet, the Nationality and Borders Bill would make journeying to the UK without permission a criminal offence.

Compared to the [2.2 million Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan alone](#), the UK government has said it will only accept 20,000 Afghan refugees – around 5000 a year, following the Taliban taking of power in Afghanistan. Even these small numbers are not being met via ‘formal routes’ as thousands have been left stranded in Afghanistan with evacuation efforts not able to bring them to safety.

Outside of my work for Migrant Voice I provide immigration advice at Brushstrokes Community Project Sandwell and I am contacted daily by many Afghans asking for my help.

In advice work my first port of call is checking the Home Office’s country guidance, which gives crucial information for decision makers and legal representatives as to the position on granting people asylum.

But in this instance, there has been little or no guidance from the Home Office. The only country policy information to be found on Afghanistan is on [healthcare and from December 2020](#).

Our members, people I represent and others in the Afghan diaspora have been frantic in trying to get family out, to no avail. They contact me for advice, help and information, which frustratingly I can’t give because there is no information and guidance or actual pathways. “In fact, [the Defence Minister has encouraged people to leave Afghanistan in whichever way they can](#), which contradicts the new proposed Borders Bill, which would criminalise those following this advice.

[Downing Street have confirmed](#) it is going to set up ways to evacuate people from third countries. Yet, there is no concrete guidance on government websites to help Afghans take such routes. We need to provide this information and a real process now.

The situation starkly illustrates that people desperate to flee need to take whatever route necessary to reach safety; we must recognise this and provide protection to all regardless of how they journey.

For Afghan asylum seekers who were already in the UK before the recent events, their future is still uncertain as their cases are on hold with no decisions being made. This cannot be right; they should be given refugee status immediately.

The government is out of sync with public opinion, as people from all walks of life have been demanding the government do more. We must stop the attempts of the Borders Bill to criminalise asylum. No matter how an asylum seeker lands in the UK they should be treated with dignity and compassion.

Image caption: Yasamin Saidi, 23, a student at Manchester University, who came to the UK as a child from Afghanistan.

Image credit: Courtesy of Salman Mirza.

Would you like help with Basic IT skills?

We can help with:-

Using the internet for shopping/jobsearch/information

Making and receiving video calls (Zoom/WhatsApp/-
Telegram/Jitsi)

Setting up and using email

Filling in online forms/applications

Making appointments online

Starting 14th September 2021. Appointments available on Tuesdays and Fridays with

sonia@brushstrokessandwell.org.uk

Leave your name and details with any member of the Brushstrokes team.

Brushstrokes 0121 565 2234

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