

Brushstrokes Messenger

Gather
Hudson's
Care

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

February 2019

This article celebrates the wonderful achievements of one of our unsung heroines — Makbule Gokberk — who has been a café volunteer at Brushstrokes since 2016. Makbule and her children came to the UK from Turkey in 2000 and were contacted and supported by Sister Margaret Walsh, founder of Brushstrokes. Makbule has worked extremely hard to learn English with us and has raised four successful young people, three of whom have gone on to graduate from university with honours. In January 2019, Huseyin, Makbule's youngest son, received his degree from the University of Leicester. He writes: *I studied Aerospace Engineering BEng at the University of Leicester and completed with a First Class Honours while also working constantly. I am currently job hunting in my field. I went to St Philip's Primary School located next to Brushstrokes and went to Holly Lodge for both high school and sixth form. As a family we came to the UK in 2000 as refugees. My older sister and brother also went to university and graduated over nine years ago and all siblings are currently working. Brushstrokes and Sister Margaret really supported and helped my family for many years, and my mom and all of us wanted to say a thank you. This message would be very nice for the community and hopefully it will inspire other individuals out there to go and achieve even higher. Thank you.*

Huseyin Gokberk

Congratulations, Huseyin, to you and your brother and sister. Your mum is one of the kindest people one could wish to meet and with pride we loudly declare, Well done Makbule!



Well done also to Amina Akbarzai and Fatima Sidiq for passing their Life in the UK test. Both students worked very hard with Jane Alsop to achieve this result and as you can see from Fatima's notes in her study book their success is well deserved.

If you would like to study for the Life in the UK test or wish to find out more about the preparatory course at Brushstrokes please contact Jane on 0121 565 2234.

A long and illustrious history 27

1 The six wives of Henry VIII
Catherine of Aragon - Catherine was a Spanish princess. She and Henry had a difficult relationship initially. Mary survived. When Catherine was too old to have him another child, Henry decided to divorce her, hoping that another wife would give him a son to be his heir.

2 Anne Boleyn - Anne Boleyn was English. She and Henry had one daughter, Elizabeth. Anne Boleyn was unpopular in the country and was accused of taking lovers. She was executed at the Tower of London.

3 Jane Seymour - Henry married Jane Seymour after Anne Boleyn's execution. She gave Henry the son he wanted, Edward, but she died shortly after the birth.

4 Anne of Cleves - Anne was a German princess. Henry married her for political reasons but divorced her soon after.

5 Catherine Howard - Catherine Howard was a cousin of Anne Boleyn. She was also accused of taking lovers and executed.

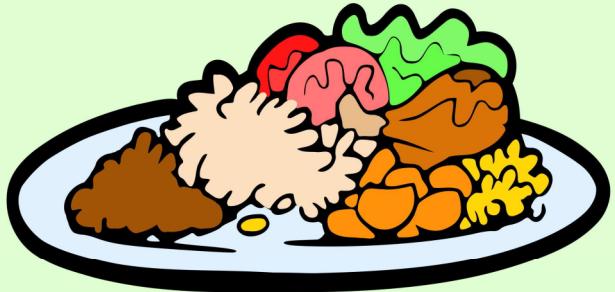
6 Catherine Parr - Catherine Parr was a widow who married Henry late in his life. She survived him and married again but died soon after.

A To divorce his first wife, Henry needed the approval of the Pope. When the Pope refused, Henry established the Church of England. In this new church, the king, not the Pope, would have the power to appoint bishops and order how people should worship.

At the same time the Reformation was happening across Europe. This was a movement against the authority of the Pope and the ideas and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestants formed their own churches. They read the Bible in their own languages instead of in Latin; they did not pray to saints or at shrines, and they believed that a person's own relationship with God was more important than submitting to the authority of the Church. Protestant ideas gradually gained strength in England, Wales and Scotland during the 16th century.



A huge thank you to Sandwell MBC for your Town Grant Award. Due to your generosity Brushstrokes has received funding to operate our Community Café for another six months. Pictured is Project Manager, David Newall next to Councillor Ann Jaron together with café volunteers and coordinator, Martin McNally.



Brushstrokes Community Café Feedback – January 2019

- * The café is somewhere to go and meet my friends.
- * Because of the café I have tried singing with Birmingham Opera Company when they visited, which I enjoyed.
- * Brushstrokes is better than other places. It is a warm, welcoming place. People here spend a long time to understand me and the food is delicious.
- * The team at Brushstrokes is the best thing about the centre.
- * I now feel more confident. The café is somewhere to go for a chat and make new friends. I meet new people and eat healthy food.
- * There are good people here and everyone is helpful. This place makes you feel comfortable and relaxed. Outside [of here], I don't see many people.
- * The volunteers here make me feel very welcome. The people here are lovely. Keep on doing more of what you are doing.
- * The best thing about Brushstrokes in general is the huge diversity of people you help.
- * Here people talk to me nicely.
- * I enjoy meeting new people here and assimilating. I enjoy coming out and mixing with others. There is a good community spirit. I feel welcome and there is good food.

A Warm Welcome to Jelena

Hello, my name is Jelena and I come from Latvia. I am a volunteer with Brushstrokes and I assist Harriet with registering new clients for advice and also go on outreach visits. I enjoy the work very much because I love helping people. I have previously volunteered at a primary school where I worked as a Classroom Assistant and as well as volunteering at Brushstrokes I also am employed as an Advice Worker at Epic CIC, Birmingham, where I utilise my language skills to help people from Russia and other eastern European countries. Other than working I am also currently studying ESOL at Level 2. I like to keep busy and after a long time I now finally feel that I have 'found' myself. I love working with children and in the future I would like to undertake a L2 Child Care course.

Thank you for all your hard work at Brushstrokes, Jelena. We are glad you are here.



March Appeal

In March Brushstrokes Community Project will be holding a new set of training sessions for anyone interested in becoming an Asylum Guide. An Asylum Guide acts as a mentor to new asylum seekers and shepherds them through the whole asylum process which can be both complicated and daunting.

Brushstrokes Community Project is currently in need of volunteers who are willing to upload data and also to train to give advice and information. Harriet will carry out training for Advice Volunteers begins in March.

Don't miss out! If you are interested in either of these positions please do make contact: 0121 565 2234



Many thanks to the Joseph Hopkins Trust for your kind financial donation designated for clothing for families in need. Your gift has made a huge difference to people's wellbeing this winter. We have received this feedback from one grateful recipient of your generosity.

Hello,

I would like to thank Brushstrokes Community Project for the love, gifts and voucher. The Primark vouchers for the kids will go a long way. God bless you all abundantly. Thank you. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Kehinde

Birmingham Community Hosting Network - BIRCH

Would you look after an asylum seekers seeking protection in your home?

Back in 2011 a small group of Birmingham residents led by a remarkable young woman called Lizzy Bell identified that something needed to be done to challenge the situation where asylum seekers were becoming destitute. As a consequence some individuals opened up their homes and created a network of volunteers who offered space in their homes for those in need. Volunteer hosts came from a variety of backgrounds. Retired people ("empty nesters") and working people; single people; traditional families with young children; people of faith and people without religious faith.



Eight years on BIRCH hosting volunteers have provided over 11,000 nights of accommodation for those seeking sanctuary. Unfortunately, once the initial claim is refused the asylum seeker loses their accommodation. Some fortunate individuals will manage to find shelter by sofa surfing. Many though, are isolated individuals who are vulnerable to exploitation.

According to charities working with refugees over 60 per cent of initial asylum claims are refused. Initial decisions by the Home Office have been notoriously poor. However between 30% - 40% of these refused claims are granted on appeal. The hosting network was created to secure a safe place to stay for those making a strong case for appeal. The applicant seeking sanctuary must provide evidence that their life is in danger and in need of protection.

Opening your home to a stranger

Claiming asylum can be an extremely stressful process. Some of our potential guests will suffer from depression and opening your home to a stranger can be very scary. BIRCH employs a part time worker to administer referrals, offer guidance to potential hosts and find a suitable match. Training days are offered to anyone who is interested in volunteering to host.

The value of this voluntary action is that the hosting network offers a place of real safety to those trying to actively sort out their immigration status. Volunteers will offer a space in their house on a temporary basis (a minimum of two weeks and no longer than 12 months). An agreement is negotiated between volunteer host and potential guest. The majority of BIRCH guests are referred by charities and N.G.O.'s working with asylum seekers based in the West Midlands conurbation.

Testimonies from hosts and guests:

"BIRCH found me a room to live in. I feel safe."

"It is really rewarding that you can have a positive impact people on some of the most vulnerable people in our society."

"It is very rewarding as we have given someone an opportunity to live in a stable, loving home where they are cared about whilst they are going through a traumatic and difficult time in their lives."

"In offering hospitality you receive so much in return!"

Interested in becoming a volunteer host? Want to find out more?

Contact david@birchnetwork.org For more information: www.birchnetwork.org

My name is Gerard Bowen, but many people call me Gerry. I am a first-year Seminarian for the Birmingham Archdiocese. A Seminarian is someone training to be a Catholic Priest. The call to the Priesthood came to me while I was still a very young boy and never left me but grew stronger as the years went by. Even though I heard the call at a very young age, I did not fully respond until I reached the age of 30. That said I had never abandoned God, but always trusted in His Will.

I was born and raised in Birmingham and this has always been my home city. After school I volunteered at Alton Castle for a gap year in Youth Work. The year was a prayerful experience as well as an enjoyable one. Following that gap year, I went to Newman University and completed a Degree in Teacher Training, then I spent many years teaching across schools in Birmingham. I mainly taught in Catholic Schools, so that I could pass on my Faith to the future generation. All these years weren't wasted, the number people I interacted with, learnt from, aided, assisted and taught, have only led to me gaining a deeper experience of God's world and His people.

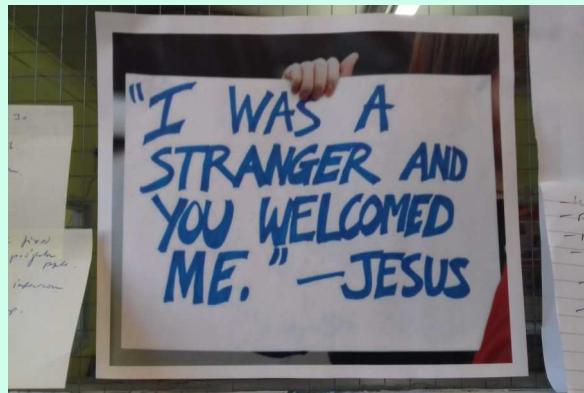


One of the many roles a Priest plays in their position is to serve the needs of the community. The Archdiocese sent me to volunteer at Brushstrokes in order to gain a deeper appreciation for the communities to which I will be serving, after my ordination to the Priesthood. Having spent the last few weeks volunteering at Brushstrokes Community Project, I have witnessed the incredible way in which the staff and volunteers serve the needs of the community, especially with the Asylum Seekers and Refugees. The invaluable example I have observed while at Brushstrokes will never leave me. Whilst volunteering at Brushstrokes, I aided in lessons as a Teaching Assistant, which brought back some memories of my teaching days. I also accompanied some of the staff on their Outreach; seeing the conditions that the Refugees and Asylum Seekers are living in, made me realise how bad their situations must have been back in their home country. Many people passed through the doors of Brushstrokes and listening to their stories has really touched my heart.

I feel honoured to have been allowed to help where I could at Brushstrokes, for they truly live out the Gospel, especially Matthew 25:40, "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did unto me."

Gerard Bowen

Gerry provided a warm, humble and approachable presence at Brushstrokes and demonstrated a cheerful willingness to tackle any task allocated him. We are happy that he was here for a short time in January. Thank you very much Gerry.



It is very interesting to me, having read Gerry's lovely article above, that he chose to include the great passage from St Matthew 25 to illustrate his clear understanding of the work at Brushstrokes Community Project. While it is true that all people, of every faith or of no formal faith, are welcome and served here, there is an underlying ethos of hospitality to the stranger as taught by Jesus in the gospels. I keep the image (left) pasted to the office window above my head as a reminder that, no matter how weary or cynical I may feel, The Master identified Himself with the most vulnerable of people and therefore every person is worthy of respect and kindness. No one is to ever be made to feel they are dispensable or have been discarded. Indeed

Matthew's powerful standard describes that it is specifically by being kind, respectful and welcoming to others in practical ways that the essence of true 'religion', no matter by which name it is called, can be recognised.

Thank you to all who continue to motivate us to work out our original mission: to seek and serve the 'hidden poor'.

**Nigel Chandra
Centre Coordinator**





THANK
YOU!

Thank you to Housing Options for your recent funding donation. With your help we have been able to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables to give out to people in need to improve dietary intakes.

knit & natter



Rukhsana (right), a member of the Brushstrokes Knit and Natter group, says, 'I feel very proud of myself because I couldn't knit like this before, but I have learned from Sara. I used to think only lucky people could make things like this but now I am doing it myself. Thank you all'.



The Knit and Natter group is run by Brushstrokes' volunteers, Sara and Kathy, and aims to help isolated ladies of all ages and backgrounds rediscover their self-confidence as they learn new knitting skills. All materials are provided and if you would like to join the session please contact Brushstrokes on 0121 565 2234.





Brushstrokes Essay Competition

Congratulations to Nessma Abdalla for winning the Brushstrokes November 2018 Parliament Week essay competition. Judge, Dave Newall, Brushstrokes Project Manager said: 'Nessma's essay ["Does Democracy Work?"] showed a clear understanding of democracy, how it works and the challenges it faces. She provided a good comparison of the pros and cons of democracy that was clearly presented and argued. Well done!'

Nessma, a doctor from Sudan, is currently studying IELTS at Brushstrokes. She is pictured here with fellow students receiving her prize of a £25 Amazon voucher.

What's on at Brushstrokes 2019

Monday

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

Tuesday

Food distribution (1200 — 1500).
ESOL classes.
Beginners 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

Knit and Natter (10.00 — 12.00).
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:



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ESB



Providing a service for those in need



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