



and a peaceful 2018
from all at
Brushstrokes Community Project



A huge thank you to all the people, schools and organisations who have donated toys and other gifts to Brushstrokes this December so that we could give these out to children from the borough of Sandwell and beyond. Thank you especially to the teams of helpers from Business in the Community and Nishkam Help who have dedicated their valuable time to wrap gifts on our behalf: Blakemore Wholesale, Mondelez International and Nishkam Help Birmingham. The wrapped gifts will be handed out by Santa to children at our Christmas parties and also delivered by 'Santa's little helpers' to families across our community.



Brushstrokes' staff members, Sally and Martin, receiving toys from the lovely children of St John Bosco RC Primary School, West Bromwich.



Please Note!

Brushstrokes will close for the Christmas period from 3pm Thursday 21st December 2017 and reopen on Tuesday 2nd January 2018.

The Great Escape

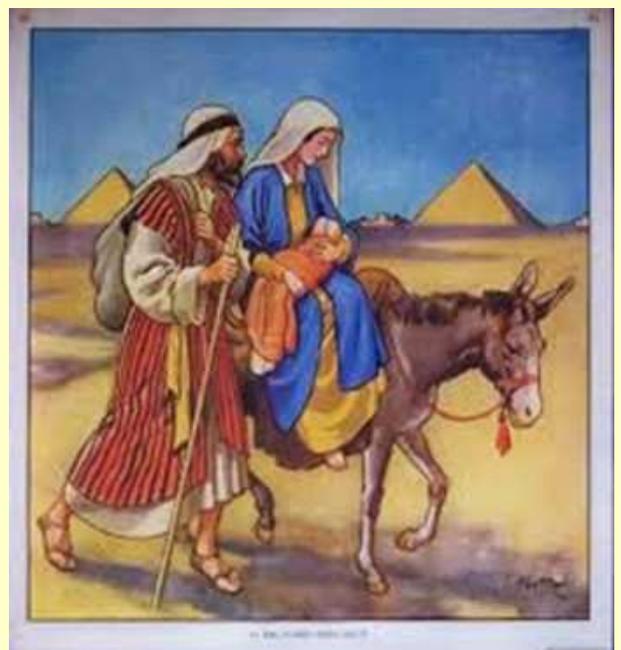
Preparing for Christmas can be a time of great excitement for some and yet a time of great anxiety for others. There can be joy in the decorating of the house or the putting together of our lists for Santa or there can be fear of being caught after fleeing our homeland for want of a slightly better future. At this time of year we will see all the adverts for Homeless charities looking to help those out on the streets and for those families who are unable to afford food to feed themselves let alone presents for their kids. There is also the worry of asylum seekers and refugees who are here. Maybe they have their family with them or maybe they have found themselves being split from their relatives and are all alone. BUT There is hope and that hope is what we celebrate at Christmas. The fact that God so loved the world that he sent, **'His only son [...]'**. We are all of us called whether we are Jewish, Christian, Muslim or of no faith to radiate love to our neighbours regardless who they are! What we Christians would usually airbrush over is the fact that the Holy Family themselves ended up being refugees, fleeing for their lives to get away from Herod who wanted to retain power and so massacred the infants in order to retain it. (sound familiar??)

At this time of year we can, rightly, get caught up with preparations of the many different kinds but coming from a Christian perspective we also have the spiritual preparation. The chance to allow us to make the world a better place, however so slightly, for others. This spiritual preparation can take the form of prayer or financial aid, donating furniture or clothes or even a spare room at the inn? In Christianity we are called to live what Jesus referred to as the greatest commandment – 'To love each other as I have loved you'. In Islam it is one of the five pillars of the faith to offer charity to others. In humanist/ atheistic terms it is basically doing one's best to be nice to others.

Regardless of the background we come from the general idea is the same – 'To treat others with respect and dignity'. So maybe this Advent/ Christmas time we will think of someone else and keep them in our thoughts and prayers. Maybe we will go that extra mile to support people in their greatest time of need while they are awaiting word of their refugee status? Or maybe we will just bring a little glimmer of hope into their lives and so allow them to become what they are meant to become – Children of G_D who can grow in virtue and safety to live the lives they were meant to live. In doing all of this maybe this year they will, unlike the Holy Family, find some room at the Inn.

Oh star of Bethlehem guide us in our journey towards the gift of others. May we celebrate that gift and may we be ever safe and sound when in its presence. Amen

Owen Gallagher is an Oscott College Seminarian and also volunteers with Brushstrokes as part of our Outreach team.



Well done!

Here we focus on the cases of four volunteers and service users whose levels of self confidence and optimism have increased as a result of involvement with Brushstrokes' services and activities. We admire these four outstanding ladies!

Asha has been an administration volunteer at Brushstrokes since the summer of 2017.

She says, 'I enjoy coming to Brushstrokes because the people are friendly and supportive. I help in reception and with admin work and I also join in the sewing classes. It has really helped my self confidence to be a volunteer here and I hope to get more involved at Brushstrokes. I would love to get better IT skills!'



Brushstrokes ESOL Teaching Volunteer, and member of the weekly 'Knit and Natter' group, Junior, proudly shows the woolly hat (complete with pompom) she has made. Well done Junior!

Helai, a previous volunteer at Brushstrokes, came to the UK from Afghanistan as a refugee in 2000. Feeling lost and anxious about her situation she came to Brushstrokes in 2002 to learn English. Here,

she got the opportunity to volunteer in the Brushstrokes canteen. She says volunteering at Brushstrokes built up her confidence and put her in the right path for employment. Helai is now working at Victoria Park School, Smethwick as a lunch time supervisor. She is very happy in her work, feeling strong and independent because she feels she has fulfilled her ambitions.



Helai was interviewed for this article by Yasameen (pictured here on the left), Brushstrokes' Administration Volunteer.



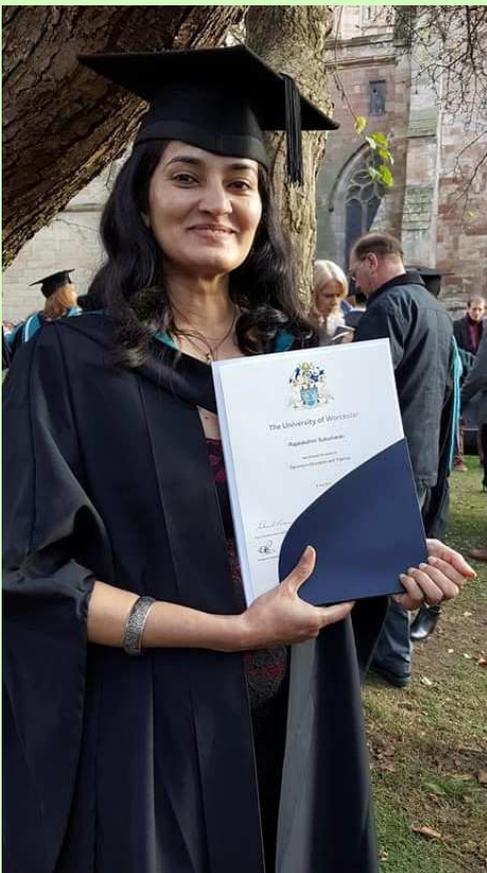
Tahereh, from Iran, is, quite rightly, very pleased with the new dress she has made in the Brushstrokes sewing class. Sewing tutor, Nasim, says, 'It took Tahereh around four sessions to complete the dress. Despite the fact that Tahereh and I do not share a common language she has been an amazing student! She has followed my step-by-step instructions to the letter and copied my practical demonstrations. I am very proud of her!'

To join Nasim's sewing class in the new year please contact Brushstrokes Community Project on 0121 565 2234.



Sewing Class at Brushstrokes

Brushstrokes' sewing class meets every Thursday morning from 0900 till 1100. Students in the sessions bring their own fabrics but use Brushstrokes' sewing machines to create beautiful items of clothing and household items. The activity is aimed at helping beginners and those with more advanced experience to develop tailoring and machine skills and the qualified teacher, Nasim, would welcome more students from January 2018 onwards. The course is free for anyone in receipt of benefits; please call Brushstrokes on 0121 5656 2234 for more details.



Congratulations to Lakshmi Sukumaran, Brushstrokes Teaching Volunteer, on the occasion of graduating from the University of Worcester with a Level-5 Diploma in Education and Training (DET).

Lakshmi says, 'I have been an ESOL volunteer with Brushstrokes for the past five years. I was a secondary school English teacher in India and when I moved to the UK in 2006 Brushstrokes provided me with a beacon of light of hope and inspired me to pursue a career in adult education. Teaching at Brushstrokes has been an exhilarating experience ever since. Being able to interact with people from diverse cultures and striving to bring about positive changes in their lives has been a humbling and rewarding journey for me.

I completed a Level-5 Diploma in Education and Training four months ago and the immense support and guidance I received from the Brushstrokes ESOL Co-Ordinator, Jane Alsop, is indescribable. I have also been fortunate enough to receive encouragement and support from my colleagues and other volunteers. I secured a job as an ESOL Lecturer at Sandwell College in March 2017. It gives me a great a sense of joy and pride to say that it is Brushstrokes that has channelled my successful career as a teacher and I hope I can continue to serve this great organisation for a long time!'



To ALL the individuals, families and organisations who have supported Brushstrokes throughout 2017 and helped us make a difference to the lives of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Thank you. Our deepest wishes for a peaceful, healthy, happy and safe 2018.

The befriending, outreach and café services at Brushstrokes Community Project have been helped for the past few months by Jesuit Novitiates Paulo and Matthew (and their travelling companion, Walter!). Here they briefly introduce themselves and their work. We are immensely grateful for their kind assistance and always cheerful presence. We wish them every success in their future paths.



Dia dhaoibh!

My name is Matthew Tumulty, I'm 29 and from Galway, a city on the west coast of Ireland. I worked as an Operations Control Manager for Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) before joining the Society of Jesus in August 2017.

As a Jesuit novice studying to become a Catholic priest (something which I wanted to be since I was 8 years old, but God sometimes takes us the scenic route!), part of my studies involves volunteering in various charitable works, such as Brushstrokes. In only a short few months at Brushstrokes, I have been and continue to be inspired by the sheer dedication and enthusiasm of the staff and volunteers in everything they do. They truly live out I have learned that while every person's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.

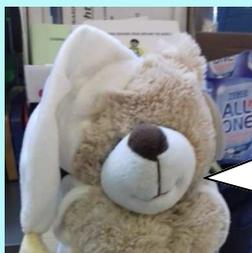
The dedication, enthusiasm and courage I've seen at Brushstrokes has been a life changing experience, which I will bring with me wherever the path of life may take me.

My name is Paolo Beltrame, I was born in Rome (Italy) on 19th November 1976, I was baptized as a Catholic, and currently I am a novice of the Society of Jesus, in Birmingham. I met the Jesuits in Edinburgh where I was lecturing on Astro-Particle Physics as a dark matter scientist at the University of Edinburgh. Dark matter is a mysterious form of matter, yet to be discovered, that constitutes 85% of what exists in our universe.



After the unexpected encounter with the Jesuits – and the “irreverent intromission” of Christ in my life – I started reconsidering my existence and after trying to discern the best response I could give to the world's needs and to God's presence within our reality, I entered the Jesuits' noviciate. The noviciate is an initial period of two years for testing and developing our vocation for the religious life. At the end of it we are expected to take three vows: of obedience, poverty and chastity.

I help Brushstrokes as part of the apostolate experiences that we have during the noviciate. I enjoy it because it tends to touch people's hearts, to take care of each individual as a person – with all their richness and fragility – regardless of the place they come from or the background they have. When we smile, we all do so in the same way – no matter our colour, race, religion, or gender.



Many thanks to Paulo and Matthew for taking me out each week. I have loved every minute of being part of your team. Hope to see you again soon.

Love, Walter.



Pictured left to right are Brushstrokes Housing Mentors Hawar, Megan and Arjana who are studying together as they work their way through their Level 2 Certificate in Information, Advice or Guidance. The 2-module course, which stretches for twelve weeks, will equip the workers to deal with all issues concerning accommodation and renting in the private sector. We wish them every success.

To make an appointment to see the Brushstrokes housing team please contact Megan on 0121 565 2234.



Sincere thanks to Warley Labour MP John Spellar who visited the Brushstrokes Community Café on Friday 17th November, as part of UK Parliament Week, to talk about his life in politics. Mr Spellar discussed some of his recent parliamentary activities and drew attention to his involvement in local issues. He also stayed to address questions and matters that are important to Brushstrokes service users.



John holds regular advice sessions for constituents in Oldbury and Smethwick and can be contacted on 0121 423 2933. Many thanks to all concerned with this visit.

WE LOVE OUR VOLUNTEERS

I retired from my job as a teacher of Special Needs children a few years ago. My time until recently has been mainly taken up with looking after young grandchildren who live locally. As the youngest started school recently I realised that I needed to involve myself in local volunteer work. With the help of Sandwell Volunteer Centre I was delighted to find 'Brushstrokes' — a project which is close to my heart.

The scope of work undertaken by the charity offered me exactly the type of challenge I was looking for and wanting to become involved in. I am currently working with Resources, offering food and clothing to members of the local community in need. Fellow volunteers and staff have made me very welcome. The sincerity and kindness of everyone involved with brushstrokes is truly inspiring!

Diane Hill, Resources Volunteer



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Brushstrokes receives support from:

