May 2023

Action For Refugees In Lewisham

Spring news from AFRIL

A message from our Director

Welcome to Spring - I am delighted to share our news! As ever, it has been busy and productive here at Action for Refugees in Lewisham!

Rainbow Club children closed their learning this term with a fantastic Easter art trip to the National Gallery, delivered by our very own teacher Sadegh. The Foodbank addressed food insecurity of local families whilst putting on a public art exhibition at the Gerald Moore Gallery. Our Allotment of Refuge has hosted some new friends from IBM to develop the site, and together with our members are gaining speed with our Grow Back Greener project turning the Allotment into a centre of climate resilience.

We have welcomed new staff to the expanding Advice and Advocacy team who do outstanding complex casework to get homeless families off the streets, people trapped in inappropriate hotel accommodation into safe places, and ensure that everyone can gain the knowledge and support to take concrete steps to improve their circumstances, be that resolving immigration status, securing work or essential benefits, or accessing life changing health support.

Our partnerships are very important to us. We work with Southwark Law Centre and Trust for London to provide immigration representation to families outside the scope of legal aid and we are welcoming a new partner, the leading legal aid law firm Deighton Pierce Glynn, with whom we are developing our legal work in the area of social welfare thanks to the support of the Greater London Authority. Our partners St Peter's Church, Fairbeats, the One Tree Hill Allotment Society, Creating Ground and others, make what we do possible and all the more richer. Thank you to you, and to all our volunteers and funders.

We will soon be calling on you to spread the word about our annual Big Give Champions for Children fundraising campaign. Between 6th-20th June you may receive more emails from us than usual. Please bear with us! Helen has more to tell you below about this year's exciting campaign but I just want to say thank you in advance for sharing it with your networks to help us reach our goal to support more children than ever.

We would like to invite you to spend a lovely summer afternoon celebrating with us at our Allotment, enjoy some good food and hear more about the year at AFRIL. Put Sunday 18th June in your diary and I look forward to seeing you then!

Spring Term was another busy and exciting time at Rainbow Club...

So far this year, alongside Maths, English, Sport, Music and Art lessons, our Rainbow Club students have enjoyed a lively drama workshop run by Lewisham Youth Theatre, a trip to the National Gallery to take part in some art workshops, and our customary end of term celebration. We are also delighted to have been granted funding from the Angus Lawson Memorial Trust to help fund Rainbow Club activities over the next year.

Our Rainbow Club art teacher Sadegh is away until June, so the very capable Lucie has stepped in to run our art sessions. This term she has introduced the children to making sculptures with both clay and paper pulp - a creative way to recycle shredded paper from the office! Fairbeats also brought in two new instrument leaders, Jess and Amy who have been running our fife and ukulele sessions this term.

Mango class (Year 4-Year 6) had a lively drama workshop run for us by Lewisham Youth Theatre (LYT) at their creative hub in Lewisham Shopping Centre. The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves with LYT commenting on how enthusiastic and engaged they all were. For many children, the taster session was their first introduction to drama, and children were encouraged to join LYT's ongoing drama groups.

Our Spring term finished with our customary end of term celebration, with children showcasing their term's learning to parents, including Starfruit class' take on 'The Apprentice' where they presented their ideas for amusement park rides. Each class also gave energetic music performances, led by their music teachers - a big thank you to Holly, Jess, and Amy from Fairbeats for putting on a fantastic show.

Over the Easter break, we took a group of 9 families (18 children) on a trip to the National Gallery in London. Art teachers, Sadegh and Lucie, ran some amazing workshops right in the heart of the gallery. Taking inspiration from the surrounding artwork, families created their own art, experimenting with reflections, light, and shadows.

We're very pleased to announce we have just been granted funding from the Angus Lawson Memorial Trust, to help fund Rainbow Club activities over the next year. Thank you to Kate, Sylvie, and everyone at ALMT for choosing to support us! We'd also like to give our appreciation to The Leathersellers' Foundation, who have helped fund the Rainbow Club over the past 4 years. Their funding has now come to an end but the impact it has had on Rainbow Club and the families we support will continue far beyond. So a huge thank you for all of your support, from everyone at Rainbow Club!

Champions for Children Campaign - 3 weeks to go!

AFRIL's 2023 BIG GIVE Champions for Children campaign is 'Food for Thought - feeding young minds of the future' and supports the work of the food bank, art group and allotment in providing healthy food for hungry children, artmaking to inspire self-confidence and resilience and a place of welcome, sanctuary and well-being at the allotment.

Thank you so much to those of you who pledged match funding to get us through stage 1 of the campaign! We now have less than 3 weeks to go before the main direct giving campaign opens and we need everyone's help to spread the word!

Between 6th - 20th June we have just two weeks to raise £7,500. If we make our target then the funds will be DOUBLED by our pledgers and our match funder the Childhood Trust. You can view the campaign page here.

The donation link will go live for 2 weeks from 12 noon on 6th June - 12 noon on 20th June and we will share this with you directly. Please add the date to your diary! Expect a few extra emails from us during the fortnight. We'd be so grateful if you could help us spread the word!

The Childhood Trust
CHAMPIONS for CHILDREN
Supporting children living in poverty in London

BigGive

Helping Hands Food Bank and Wellbeing News...

2023 has already proved busy for the food bank programme, which consists of our Helping Hands food bank, allotment of refuge and art@home well-being project. We continue to be running at capacity; supporting 39 families at every collection, including 97 babies and children. In January, courtesy of Wrap Up London, we distributed over 200 winter coats to adults and children who attend the food bank and /or Rainbow Club. In addition, our partners, the unconnected, provided another 70 free sim cards with free data, texts and calls for food bank clients and their children aged 11+ and we gave out 60 beautifully knitted blankets donated by a local church to help keep everyone winter warm. Most recently, we have received 40 reconditioned laptops with data, courtesy of the Good Things Foundation.

Together with the volunteer team from Good Shepherd St Peter's church, we have agreed to continue the food voucher system that we introduced due to core food shortages and unreliable supermarket deliveries last September. Vouchers, alongside fresh fruit and vegetables, have been extremely well received by clients, giving them more choice and more ability to budget each week. We continue to receive regular donations from Felix Fareshare, Lee Greens and Youth Against Crime, without which we could not provide the fresh food contribution to families.

Many families attending the food bank experience multiple and complex challenges everyday associated with their status, poor housing, lack of finances, their children's education, and the health and wellbeing of themselves and their children. We are so fortunate that due to the expansion of the AFRIL casework team, we now have a dedicated monthly visit to the food bank by Bev, who can connect with clients and take forward urgent referrals herself or by the wider casework team.

Our allotment team was busy at the beginning of the year sowing, building new raised beds and making the land ready for the season. Together, they have built 3 new raised beds, added a bed in our polytunnel and completed construction of a wildlife pond. As part of our Grow Back Greener project, they have been experimenting with a leaky hose irrigation system, and building a wicking bed to grow this year's yams. Our first allotment harvest arrived at the food bank in April, including broccoli stems and leaves, chives. kale, cabbage, oregano, lemon balm, perpetual spinach, mustard spinach and cocarde lettuce.

On 25th March, Rose, AFRIL's allotment gardener led our first allotment of refuge corporate volunteering day with a team from IBM. The team took delight in being out in the open air and away from their computer screens and desks. The 2 team challenges for the day to move the existing AFRIL shed ready for shed no 2 and to wood chip the paths to assist drainage were easily and skilfully met and the day was rounded up with a well-deserved pizza. We are pleased to have made this super connection with Matt, Luke, Gabby and their teams and already have plans for working together on a number of different projects.

We are so proud that the families who attend our art@home group held their first public exhibition. Huge thanks to Haf and his team from the Gerald Moore gallery who supported us and

Elaine, AFRIL's Art Project Leader, who curated our Art without Borders exhibition which ran from 20th - 25th February.

Thank you to staff, trustees, volunteers and friends who visited our private view on Friday 24th February. It was a lovely evening and a very special time for our artists. The group worked with Charlie Bird, a new filmmaker friend, to make a video of their experiences of the art group and making art. You can see it here: https://www.afril.org.uk/2023/05/15/art-without-borders-the-film/

Advice and Advocacy

As we encounter an ever more turbulent, hostile and anti-humanitarian political environment towards the asylum seeking and vulnerable migrant community, our work in the Advice and Advocacy Service has never felt both more important and challenging. As always, we continue to be inspired by the resilience and solidarity of our members. Find out more

Happily, we welcomed Emma Loffler to our expanding team in March, Emma joins us with a wealth of experience in housing and benefit entitlement and her new role as Advice and Advocacy Officer will allow AFRIL to meet the increasing need of our wonderful members.

Bevlyn, our dedicated Outreach Officer, has continued and developed her work in Asylum Hotels in Lewisham. As the only organisation in Lewisham offering complex, specialist casework to Asylum Hotel residents we are seeing exceptionally high demand. However, in just three months a number of residents have been supported to access Asylum Support payments, move to more suitable self contained accommodation and address serious safeguarding concerns.

In March the Advice and Advocacy Service underwent a re-assessment for our Advice Quality Standard certification. After an in-depth review of all areas of the service our assessor not only re-accredited AFRIL's Advice Level Standard, but approved the highest level of Casework Level Standard. Advice Quality Standard's enhanced accreditation of the Advice and Advocacy Service is a testament to the work of our wonderful advisors, volunteers, members and supporters, and we look forward to further expanding and developing our service.

And finally, it is important to note that despite what can often feel like overwhelming hopelessness within the migration sector currently, as a team we continue to be inspired by our members' resilience and solidarity. We are always impressed by the way in which our members advocate for themselves, share their depth of knowledge as experts by experience and support each other.

Chloe
Advice and Advocacy Manager

Meet Chloe White, Advice and Advocacy Manager...

I came to AFRIL after managing the team of the Shadow Foreign Secretary, this was an interesting role but I was keen to move back into immigration and asylum work as this is my specialism. I have previously been a Coordinator at the British Red Cross Refugee Services and before this spent time at Detention Action doing outreach advice in immigration detention centres. In 2021 I graduated with a first class degree in Law from London School of Economics, during my studies my research focused on the experiences of undocumented migrants subjected to modern slavery.

Save the Date!

Put a date in your diary for the AFRIL Summer Party. Always a vibrant and happy occasion, we will once again be hosting at our Allotment of Refuge, One Tree Hill on Sunday 18th June from 1-4pm Join us to experience the calm and beauty of One Tree Hill, meet friends you know and have yet to meet, enjoy food from around the world and find out about all our AFRIL projects.

Support our work for free!

Did you know you can support AFRIL without actually making a donation? Sign up to Easy Fundraising and a proportion of the cost of your online purchases will be donated to AFRIL. It's completely free and you can shop as normal with no added costs. So far, we've raised over £300 from this platform - thanks to those who have already signed up!

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