December 2022

Action For Refugees In Lewisham

Winter news from AFRIL

A message from our Director

Welcome to our Winter newsletter. I want to start this message with a thank you. Thank you to AFRIL's staff and volunteers who have worked tirelessly this year supporting our families. Thank you to our funders and supporters, without whom this work would not be possible. And thank you to AFRIL's clients, for putting your trust in us and allowing us to walk this journey with you.

It has been without doubt another challenging year. With the worst of the pandemic behind us, we then moved into challenging economic times. The cost of living crisis, or as our partners at Southwark Law Centre rather aptly put it, the 'inequality crisis' has had, and is continuing to have, a significant detrimental impact on the families that we work with. Already living in poverty, uncertainty and too often homlessness, the rising cost of living has added almost unbearable pressure. It's why at times like these, services and support from local charities like AFRIL, address an urgent need. The Foodbank team at AFRIL and St Peter's Church have been creative and dynamic in adjusting our service model to continue to support the increased number of families that are living in extreme food poverty. Under Rose's stewardship this year, the Allotment of Refuge has gone from strength to strength, providing a breath of fresh air for clients alongside a yield of crops to supplement our food parcels. We were delighted to be featured in Saga magazine's October issue, casting a spotlight on this important work and enabling our members to speak for themselves. The art@home group has been a lifeline for families needing distraction, a creative outlet and peer support, with an exciting upcoming exhibition at the Gerald Moore Gallery. Rainbow Club ensures that children living in this environment do not fall behind at school, as is statistically more likely when coming from an asylum/refugee background. Moreover, it provides a place of safety, warmth and fun.

This month we welcomed two new staff members to the AFRIL team - Chloe White, Advice and Advocacy Manager, and Bevlyn Annokye, Outreach Advice Worker. They both bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their roles and have already made a significant impact, securing emergency housing for clients made homeless, and supporting families struggling with bureaucracy to improve their situations. They have developed a helpful signposting guide on the AFRIL website for where to go if you need help during the holiday period and are on hand for emergencies. Some emergencies that we hoped would not happen were removals to Rwanda. Unfortunately, the High Court judgement handed down on Monday found that this disgraceful government policy was not unlawful, whilst also recognising that the claimants' cases had not been 'properly considered'. We are expecting an appeal application in January, and we will support any local residents who receive notice to be removed to Rwanda.

I think all that is left to be said is, I hope you enjoy the articles in this newsletter where you can find out more about the past few months of AFRIL's projects, and the feedback that our clients have given about the impact of our services this year. Thank you for all your support and I hope that you have a wonderful Christmas if you celebrate it, and if not then a restful holiday period.

Best wishes,

Sophie Wickham

An exciting Autumn Term at Rainbow Club...

We've reached the end of a busy Autumn term at Rainbow Club! This term, the children have taken part in a poetry project called 'Seven Poet Trees' and enjoyed visits to soft play and the Horniman Museum, alongside their usual English, Maths, Sport and Arts lessons. The term ended with the children receiving Christmas presents that were kindly donated to us by the Salvation Army and Lewisham 14th Scouts.

Rainbow Club children have been further exploring their creativity, taking part in a poetry project called 'Seven Poet Trees', part of Lewisham's London Borough of Culture 2022. The project involved 4 poetry workshops at the school, led by poet LiLi K Bright. Children wrote poetry focussing on themes of nature and the environment and the project culminated in the planting of a new oak tree in Mayow Park in

November. At the planting, LiLi performed the children's poetry to a 240 strong crowd, who also saw performances by Forest Hill Boys and Young Lewisham Project.

We continue our regular Saturday programme with targeted English and Maths tuition for refugee and migrant children, following the national curriculum and delivered by our experienced and specialised teachers. The children have made great progress and have enjoyed their Arts and Sports time to complement the academic learning.

In December, Passion Fruit class (Reception-Y2) enjoyed a fun-filled trip to soft play, while Starfruit (Y2-Y4) and Mango (Y4-Y6) classes visited the Horniman museum. At the museum, both classes were treated to a creative music session run by Fairbeats, and tried out various musical instruments from the Hands on Music gallery. Starfruit also explored "ELMER and Friends: The Colourful World of David McKee", an exhibition celebrating over 30 years of Elmer the Patchwork Elephant. Mango class got up close and personal with hundreds of butterflies in the Butterfly House!

This is the term that we take a step back to review and record the impact and achievements of the Rainbow Club for our main funders BBC Children in Need. This year, not only have the children made very good progress in academic assessment but the feedback from children and parents has been heartwarming and we thought we'd share some of it with you.

Parent feedback included:
"They're doing well improve in their education"; "She has improves in her learning"; "They are doing good at school now"; "She's doing well. Learning and catching up. She loves the place."

"My youngest son, he had difficulties to read and write and now he's starting to read and
write. My oldest daughter enjoys the art and the music. They go to the school and have
lessons with the ukulele - they're very proud to use it without hesitating."

"They have come out of their shells and are more confident"; "They are always keen for Saturday lessons."; "Can see them mixing with people. They don't usually like mixing with people."
"My child has improve academically , socially and morally."

When asked to describe Rainbow Club, our children said:

“The Rainbow Club is rainbow and wonderful”; “What I want”; “It’s a school with games”; “Normal”; “Amazing”; “Surprising”; “Just right”; “That Rainbow Club is very fun and we learn a lot”; “The best thing in my life”.

Our last day of term was on 17th December and all children received Christmas presents, kindly donated to us by the Salvation Army and Lewisham 14th Scouts. Parents came to watch the children showcase this term’s work and give music performances, followed by a celebration meal where parents and volunteers brought dishes to share with everyone. As always, a great way to close out the Autumn term before the Christmas break.

Autumn at the Helping Hands Food Bank

It's been a busy three months at the Helping Hands Food Bank! We've remodelled our food bank programme, have re-opened our drop-in and cafe after two and half years, and have raised funds through the Big Give to enable us to undertake a feasibility study on setting up a social supermarket. Find out more

It’s been a busy end of year for the Food Bank programme team. Christmas came early, with Christmas cards and presents for children at our drop-in on 10th December and presents for adults on 17th December. Huge thanks to the children of Lewisham 14th Scout group, Acorn Books and the congregation of Good Shepherd St Peter's church for your wonderful donations of gifts for food bank families! Many thanks Rae and Louise for all your hard work organising the present wrapping and giving. A big thank you as well to the Childhood Trust, through which 14 Foodbank families have been given free tickets to Disney on Ice this Christmas!

We have just received our annual delivery of winter coats from the brilliant Wrap Up London Campaign WrapUp London | Donate a coat this winter (handsonlondon.org.uk). This will provide very much appreciated winter coats for children and parents attending our Food bank and Rainbow Club. Huge thanks to anyone who donated a winter coat this year.

We are just about to say farewell to Rae, our US intern, to our team. Rae has been with the team since early November, assisting on projects and conducting research to support our future plans and gaining her University credits in the process.

Thank you Rae, we hope you take with you some lovely memories of our food bank art group and Saturday drop ins. All the best with your studies and future plans.

Part of Rae's work has been to help collate artworks made by children and parents from our art@home group into a directory. These works will form part of our Art without Borders exhibition at the Geoffrey Moore Gallery in February next year. We are extremely excited to be offered the chance for the story of the food bank art group to be told by its members themselves in a public exhibition. Many thanks to Elaine, our AFRIL Art group leader and Haf, gallery curator, for your support and encouragement on this project. Watch out for details of our exhibition which will run from 2nd – 25th Feb and our private view on Friday 3rd Feb 2022. If you are interested in helping us fundraise for the exhibition, please get in touch.

The reopening of our food bank drop-in and free cafe at St Peter's church after closure in March 2020 has given everyone a real boost. Families stay and chat and take a breath from their complex and busy world. Volunteers enjoy sharing a cup of tea as part of the welcome. The drop-in also provides a welcome 'warm hub' during these cold winter days which are exacerbating the cost-of-living crisis for families attending AFRIL services. The New Year will see our case work support team holding regular surgeries at the food bank drop-in to support clients with their housing and financial issues.

We are continuing with our new model of giving out Aldi food vouchers alongside fresh fruit and vegetables. This is in response to the current core food shortages and uncertainties of supermarket deliveries. However, clients tell us that they prefer the vouchers as they can choose what food to buy each week. The brilliant group Youth Against Crime have made donations to our core food items this year, and on behalf of our families, we are very grateful.

"I love the way you guys change the food items to voucher card and I think is the best way and people can get the things they want by them self."

Rae, our US intern, has also conducted research about food banks and social supermarket models in the UK and the US as part of our current BIG GIVE Social Supermarket campaign. This is our plans for a sister project to our current food bank run in conjunction with the volunteer team at Good Shepherd St Peter's church. Exploring social supermarket models addresses our key objective: a way to support vulnerable families transition from the crisis foodbank in a supported way. This will expand our capacity to support both families in crisis and refugees with recent status, who cannot afford high street food prices.

You can read about the campaign we ran here: Foodbank social supermarket (thebiggive.org.uk).

All the donations collected up to the campaign target of £500 will be matched 100% by funders Lewisham Local/ London Catalyst. Additional donations support additional staff time on the campaign research.

Rose, our allotment gardener, has been busy making plans for the New Year. Our Sunday Gardening Club will begin in January. The club is free for anyone who wants to join the team on the allotment of refuge to grow food. It will run fortnightly on Sunday afternoons from 1pm - 4pm. Why not join us and help us grow our allotment community of friendship, and grow more food to contribute to the food bank parcels: Email rose@afril.org.uk

Finally and importantly, our Food Bank team continue to campaign for food justice as part of local initiatives by the Lewisham Food Group Network and Lewisham Food Justice Strategy and national campaigns as members of the Independent Food Agency Network (IFAN) Independent Food Aid Network UK

Helen Mason - Food Bank Director

What our clients have to say...

AFRIL's Monitoring Officer has been developing our impact measurement frameworks this year. We collect both quantitative and qualitative feedback and data on our projects to ensure that they are responsive, relevant, impactful and do what we say they are going to do! We make changes and adjustments to services on the basis of this feedback, and report to our funders. Find out more and see what our clients said in our annual survey .

"All our family feel grateful for your help and support. I hope you can help another family too."
AFRIL client

A key part of the monitoring framework is our annual client feedback survey which we launched this over the summer. Members completed it in their own words online and for those who found this difficult, our fantastic volunteer Zakari had dozens of individual conversations with families to ensure that their views were recorded. We've included a flavour of this feedback below and our annual report which will be presented at AFRIL's AGM on 26 January will contain more!

Our AGM

AFRIL's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be taking place at 6pm on Thursday 26th January via Zoom. Save the date to find out more about our year, and hear from AFRIL's Project Leads and Members. Details to follow.

Are you accounting qualified or know someone who is?

AFRIL is looking for a Co-Treasurer to share this important role in keeping our charity in good financial health. It is a shared role, with a brilliant existing co-treasurer. Requiring a couple of hours volunteer time a month, which can be scheduled around other responsibilities, including a Board of Trustees meeting. Please get in touch via **info@afril.org.uk** if you would like an informal conversation about the role and the link to apply on charity job can be found **here.**

Volunteer with our advice service!

We are recruiting **Advice and Casework Volunteers** and **Volunteer Interpreters** to work with our advice service.

If you are interested in working closely with AFRIL staff to provide guided advice and casework support to AFRIL clients both in our core casework service and through Outreach Surgerys at local Asylum Support Accommodation, then the **Advice and Caseworker Volunteer role** may be for you! Click **here** to find out more and apply.

Can you proficiently interpret between English and one (or more) of the following languages **Kurdish Sorani, Arabic, Pashto, Amharic, Albanian and Spanish**? Would you like to support with bi-weekly outreach sessions at the local Asylum Support Accommodation? If so, then the **Volunteer Interpreter role** may be for you! You can find out more and apply **here**.

Support our work for free!

Did you know you can support AFRIL without actually making a donation? Sign up to **Easy Fundraising** and **Amazon Smile** 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 - thanks to those who have already signed up! Find out more

Sign up to Easy Fundraising **here** and every time you shop online, eligible retailers will donate a proportion of the cost of the item 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!

The link to sign up is here: **https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/**

Sign up to Amazon Smile and Amazon will donate a proportion of the cost of the item to AFRIL. This won't cost you anything!

To sign up, visit **https://smile.amazon.co.uk/**, sign in with your Amazon account, and select "AFRIL" as the cause to support.