



West End Refugee Service

strength through support



Issue 65: April 2016

Welcome to the April edition of the WERS newsletter.

Knit 1, Purl 279!

Sheila Sharp has been knitting for WERS for a fantastic 11 years but has decided to put down her knitting needles at last! Sheila, of Cochrane Park, first heard about us in 2005 through the Tyneside Ladies Barbershop and West End United Reformed Church. She started knitting cot blankets and asked anyone that she could for spare wool. It snowballed from there and, as Sheila said "The more I got, the more I knitted!"

Sheila has made a staggering 279 blankets for us since then and at approximately 15 hours spent per blanket, she has given up about 4185 hours of her time over the years! This is an amazing achievement for which we are all so grateful.



Sheila with WERS Operations Manager Helen

Sheila remembers one day receiving a massive delivery of donated wool:

"When I got all that wool it was like winning the pools. I was overjoyed".

She also fondly remembers her husband asking if he could have a blanket knitted for him when she received all that wool, and she replied that she would happily make one for him as long as he bought his own wool!

The Sharps were so pleased to hear that one of our clients recently told us that her son, who is now an adult, still has his blanket from his childhood. Now that Sheila is no longer able to make any more blankets she hopes she can encourage others to do so:

"I've thoroughly enjoyed doing it and hopefully it will encourage others to do something similar. I got a real sense of pleasure from it. I loved coming to WERS over the years and seeing everyone, especially Evelyne and having a chat with her".

Melissa Younger
WERS Office Manager

Local schools and universities working together with WERS... At Emmanuel College.....

Four very enterprising Year 10 students organised a wonderful multicultural event at the school to raise awareness about refugee issues and the work of WERS. WERS support worker Ali was the guest speaker and, along with the students and parents, enjoyed a delicious meal afterwards. An impromptu collection was made which raised £150 for the WERS hardship fund.

A parent wrote: *'My children were somewhat cynical perhaps before the evening but both were confounded by the presentation and about the subject matter which led to a lively debate about asylum and refugees all the way home. In the current climate, such events can only bring us closer to reality than the current media diet allows.*

Congratulations to Beth, Rebecca, Caitlin and Sarah for organising such a great evening!



At Gosforth Academy.....

Three Year 10 students reflect on the recent enrichment day:

This enrichment day gave us the chance to explore diversity and tolerance in Britain and to hear first-hand accounts of people's experiences of coming to Britain after fleeing persecution. Visiting speaker Mr Ali shared his amazing and moving story of coming to Britain as a refugee after living through the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s. Mr Ali spoke movingly of being separated from his family and witnessing the horrors of finding many of his relatives massacred. It made a very strong impression on us all and made us realise that listening to first-hand accounts of tragic events in the world is a powerful way of understanding the sad human dimension of news stories. Britain was able to give Mr Ali refuge and he now works to help others who find themselves in Newcastle following terrible ordeals in their own countries.

Mrs Van der Velde shared her insights as a member of the Jewish community and told us that her own family had found refuge in this country at a time when Jews in other parts of Europe were becoming targets of discrimination and persecution. She explained that she was free to practise her faith in Britain and stated that she was proud to be British, proud to be Jewish and proud to be a Geordie. In fact she stressed her view that the North East of England is a fantastic place to live.

It was good to hear from Hindu, Christian, Muslim and atheist students too. They all emphasised that Britain is a country that allows them to freely express their beliefs and they recognised that this freedom is not one shared by many other people across the globe where individual freedoms and rights are abused. The day gave students a chance to ask questions and think deeply about some of the issues raised. It made us feel grateful to be in a school community where in spite of many differences we can come together and show respect, tolerance and support to others.

Taha, Aurelio, Katherine

And with ENACTUS, Newcastle University

Enactus is a worldwide not-for-profit organisation in which students work within their university societies to create community outreach projects, using entrepreneurial action to empower people in need.

WERS has been piloting some group sessions for the Job Mentees to complement their one-to-one sessions with volunteer Job Mentors. Enactus students led 3 sessions for the Mentees with a focus on developing interview skills. The short course culminated in the offer of a mock job interview for each participant. The Mentees all benefitted from the group approach which, although challenging them to move outside their comfort zone, resulted in a boost in confidence and a sense of achievement.

ChariTable Bookings: 'Giving back for free has never tasted so good'!



Book a restaurant table through ChariTable bookings and £1 for every diner will be donated to WERS by the restaurant at no cost to you. Download on the App store and choose WERS as your favourite charity. For more info visit www.charitablebookings.org

Unisex shower gel, shampoo, deodorant and handcream for the destitute clients would be very much appreciated.

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