



WERS Newsletter Issue 85 Spring 2021

Welcome to our Spring newsletter, with updates on our projects, changes to our staff team, our response to the government's New Plan for Immigration, as well as details of a campaign opposing a new Detention Centre for Women in Country Durham.



#nohuman is illegal WERS staff, volunteers & people we support met on zoom to create a visual response to the plans and discuss how we can continue to fight for the rights of people seeking asylum.

We are deeply concerned about the government's proposals for Immigration Reform. The plans are harmful and inhumane: they present multiple, significant changes to policies that pose real threats to the basic human rights of people seeking sanctuary in the UK, whilst promoting misleading rhetoric around what the real issues are. We have posted a detailed response on the news page of our website and for those who receive a paper copy of our newsletter, this is included in your mailing 😊.

#NotoHassockfield A new detention centre for women is being built in Country Durham. We see the devastating effects of detention at WERS, particularly on women, who have often experienced trafficking, abuse and trauma and are supporting this campaign. To oppose these plans, you can sign this petition [Petition · The Home Secretary: Stop the new detention centre for women · Change.org](#) or join this campaign group: [No To Hassockfield – No To Hassockfield](#)

PROJECT UPDATES:

Spring in the WERS garden



'Being outside was good, not being at home thinking about my case, worrying, being down'

We are looking forward to some brighter days in our garden over the coming months, with our new volunteer project which started again this week. We're working with people we support to create a safe, social space in the garden – there'll be raised beds, seating areas, opportunities to take plants home to grow and more! Feedback on volunteering roles that involve being outside/ gardening tasks through our *skillsmatch* project is always super positive and we hope to create some more of that positivity through this project.

Other exciting developments in our volunteer project are a partnership with Newcastle United Foundation on a sports social group and an arts and crafts group – all taking place on what's app and zoom...for now!

Drop-ins and face-to-face support:

Whilst we continued offering support outside of our building, and remotely, during this last lockdown, we did limit the support we offered in the building. This month we restarted drop-ins fully on Mondays and Wednesdays. We've had a busy first week with lots of people seeking advice and help with letters and info as well as practical support around food, clothing and phone credit. We are also starting to offer wifi and supported computer access in the afternoons.



Two of our drop in volunteers in the sunny garden this week. They have been busy welcoming people, supporting with issues and signposting to specialist services.

Digital Inclusion:



'Thank God I have a tablet now. I can go in zoom, I have different classes I can go to. The tablet has helped me so much, I can connect with people and I can chat and I don't have to worry about the data running out'

We've been working with Action Foundation to

deliver this project where they supply tablets and initial training to us, and our staff and volunteers work with people to get them set up and connected. This has helped our supported volunteer project *skillsmatch* to take place online, where volunteer buddies support individuals remotely. We have helped people to access training, courses & volunteering opportunities. The tablets have also enabled invaluable social connections.

STAFF CHANGES

We said farewell to Helen Wood



In February, we said goodbye to our Support Work Manager, Helen, after 21 amazing years at WERS. Here she is with her farewell goodies! We want to say a huge thank you to Helen who has played such a significant role at WERS for so long and who has supported so many people over the years.

Welcome to Abi, Elena and Lana

We are excited to announce new members to the WERS team who will all help to deliver support and opportunities to people as we reshape the way we work as we come out of Covid restrictions.



Abi Knowles started as Volunteer Project Manager, coming from her previous role running Hartlepool Foodbank, she brings a wealth of experience in volunteer development and project management.

Elena Kassis joins us as Drop-in Supervisor. She brings experience in the health and social care sector and is an Arabic speaker. Elena is overseeing the smooth running of the drop-ins as well as offering support and advice to individuals. Elena has also undertaken roles as a befriender, skillsmatch buddy and clothing store volunteer.



Lana Kareem, who joined us last October to support with our Covid response activity, has become one of our Support Workers. Lana brings valuable experience in social work in her home country and her Kurdish language skills are already in high demand! Lana has also previously volunteered with WERS.

We look forward to sharing more news soon. With all best wishes from the WERS team.

A big thank you to all our supporters and funders:

