



Spring 2011
Issue 8

Afril News

www.afril.org.uk

Action for Refugees in Lewisham

Contents:

Manager's note	1
Sponsored Walk	1
Marco ICT news	2
Music Workshop	2
Board Update	3
ESOL	4
Max's interview	4
James' interview	4
Advice Service	5
Case Study	5
Volunteer Testimony	5
Yoga Group	6
Sewing Group	6
Cake Sale	7
Destitution fund appeal	7
Fundraising activities	8
Sponsors	8

Dear Readers,

Spring is her at last and I hope you are enjoying the sunshine! The first three months of 2011 have been very busy and we now have waiting lists for all our ESOL classes, the Monday Talk Shop and the day centres. We are now assisting an average of 230 people across all our services in any week and we have also started to limit the number of advice clients to a max of 25 each week. The majority of our clients continue to face poverty, isolation, poor health and often difficult living circumstances.

Our food distribution scheme with food donated by Sainsbury in New Cross is a great success. This is food which is unsold and is still good to eat and which will be thrown away!!!14 families for a total of 25 people are benefitting. We still continue to fundraise and organize events to raise much needed cash for our destitute clients. We organized a second cake sale at Goldsmiths College with the cakes baked by one of our clients .We are now running a destitution appeal and the full details are in this issue.

Our befriending scheme will be launched at the end of March with 4 befrienders offering extra support to 4 of our clients experiencing severe isolation compounded with poverty and ill-health. We are facing an uncertain future



because of the spending cuts .The London Borough of Lewisham Children fund grant will finish at the end of March. Community Education Lewisham is also funding our ESOL and ICT classes for one term at the time because of the uncertainties in their funding. Thus we continue to survive on limited resources with a full-time Advice Worker and part-time Manager and 7 sessional teachers. Our volunteers are our lifeblood and without them, needless to say we will not be able to exist. We have now a team of 70 volunteers contributing on average 140 hours a week. Very impressive indeed!
We welcome our new teachers this month: Catherine Carter from Trinity College and Carmen Udia from Laban Institute of Dance. They are offering Music and Dance lessons for free to our children at the Rainbow Club with great success.

Iolanda Chirico
Manager

Action for Refugees in Lewisham Sponsored Walk 2011

The walk will take place on the last day of Refugee Week, Sunday June 26th 2011 at 1.30pm. The money raised will be used to support the Action for Refugees in Lewisham Destitution Fund; providing emergency support for destitute people.

There will be two walks on the day:

- A 5.6 mile walk from the AFRIL office in Lewisham to the Thames Barrier, via the O2 in Greenwich taking 2 hours.
- 2mile walk for smaller legs and families from the O2 to the Thames Barrier along the river taking approximately 45 minutes.

Registration for the 5.6 mile walk will take place at the AFRIL office at 1pm for a 1.30pm departure. The 2mile walk will leave from the O2 at 2.45pm, so please be there at 2.30pm for registration. **Please email Vanessa Playle (Volunteer, AFRIL) at afril@hotmail.co.uk for more information and a sponsorship form**



ICT at AFRIL



Study session at AFRIL

“Our aim is to allow (everyone) to participate actively in the community development and participate freely in English culture.”

I am working with refugees in the borough of Lewisham, people who are learning ICT from the very beginning and are developing confidence not only in ICT skills, but in their English language. At the end of the course they feel more able to write letters to different departments and help their children to research information for their homework. All the students come with different stories and from different countries. Part of the course is to introduce them to modern technology and make their lives easier in communicating with people and organizations. Our aim is to allow them to participate actively in the community development and participate freely in English culture.

At the moment I have introduced email, word processing and the use of free internet tools to process information and to store data without spending money. The students are now able to work on their personal and family budgets as part of the program as well.

The students are worried about how the Cuts are going to affect them in their daily lives and the uncertainty of the next term. They are determined to study and they would like to speak out for themselves and make others know about their situation. It is important that voluntary organizations help and support them in activities where they will be immersing themselves in the community.

As a teacher of ICT in AFRIL, I feel proud to work in developing not only the ICT skills but also the sense of belonging to this city and country (but without forgetting their own backgrounds and cultures). I am preparing on how to develop a web page to make others aware of these activities and to allow these learners to truly be new digital citizens.

**Marco Munoz
ICT Tutor**



Rainbow club - music workshop

On February 26th music leaders Catherine Carter and Jennifer Raven from FairBeats! ran a music workshop with the children at the Rainbow club. The children learnt two playground games to play and sing together. Supported by the team of volunteers, Rainbow club participants played clapping games and ball games to help develop a sense of pulse and co ordination through musical play. They were also treated to a calming performance of a piece about birds by the composer Antonio Vivaldi by flautist Jennifer Raven at the end. FairBeats! hopes to run many more workshops at AFRIL in the future. If you'd like to get involved or have any ideas about what FairBeats! is doing do get in touch.

Our email is fairbeats@gmail.com and we'd love to hear from you.



Update from the board



In November 2010 we held our second Annual General Meeting (AGM) during which several new trustees were elected to join the board. The current members of the board include:

Anne Desir –

Chris Pralat – I'm AFRIL secretary ensuring our compliance with the Charity Commission, Companies House and HM Revenue and Customs;

Conal Watson – who was co-opted as trustee in February 2011;

Hana Gill – vice-chair and acting chair at the moment;

John Axon – Treasurer

Lucy Davies – website



Sadly, in February 2011 Paul Nezandoyi had to step down as our chair due to personal reasons. Paul was extremely dedicated and worked tirelessly to improve the organization and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for giving AFRIL the last two years and many, often unsocial hours.

Our current aims as board are to:

- continue to strengthen the organization and make us more sustainable by improving the quality of our services through employing a full-time manager, employing a part-time Volunteer Coordinator; achieving Legal Services Commission (LSC) Quality Mark and Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) Exemption;
- improve the experience AFRIL's volunteers have while volunteering with us by employing a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator; organizing regular joint events and meetings with volunteers and board members;
- have at least one AFRIL client joining the board in order to give our clients representation and to empower them.

I would be particularly keen to hear from AFRIL's clients, volunteers, friends and supporters about any ideas on how we can improve further as an organisation and would like to thank you all for making AFRIL such a friendly and welcoming place where asylum seekers and refugees feel safe and are treated with dignity and respect.

Chris Pralat
Secretary

Email: cpralat@yahoo.co.uk

Tel. 0791 0771 594

Interview with Max, a volunteer

How long have you been volunteering with Afril?

Since September last year.

What type of activities do you do?

I volunteer at the ESOL classes and Talk Shop, as well as Rainbow Club.

What do you like about volunteering with AFRIL?

I like to be active. It is different to all the work I have done before and it is good to be learning new skills. I like the people I meet and being able to do something which benefits others, especially when people are going through a rough patch. I have made lots of new friends. Sometimes I think I am getting out of volunteering even more than I give.



ESOL CLASSES

AFRIL's increasing popularity aside, we have a surplus of new students - some are very disappointed at being turned away due to oversubscription.

This term topics such as health, employment, shops and shopping have already been integrated into the lessons. Further still, students have been given more alphabet and vocabulary practice, grammar, and spelling tests so they are able to recognize, identify and write the letters of the alphabet in the correct order, utilize the rules of grammar, as well as being able to spell words which have been drilled into them most weeks.

Moreover, they can learn from their mistakes as practice makes perfect!

Volunteer teachers have provided invaluable support and students frequently refer to volunteers as an important feature of the classes: "They are friendly!", "They help me with difficult exercises". These are just a few examples of our students' comments.

AFRIL is very happy to be able to provide our volunteers with training on ESOL techniques during the summer term. The training will help the volunteers grading language, reducing teacher's talking time and using other ESOL techniques. No doubt, after the training volunteers will be an even bigger asset for our ESOL programme!



ESOL Volunteer Testimony

I am a voluntary ESOL teaching assistant at Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL), teaching a class of six students at the beginner level on Saturday mornings under the guidance of the ESOL teacher. The classes use the same theme as the entry level classes which are taught simultaneously but the work is adapted to the level of a beginner. It is hoped that the progress the beginner students make will enable them to eventually join the entry level class. After this class, I facilitate a Talk Shop for twelve students which takes the theme of the entry and beginner level classes and encourages the students to develop their confidence in speaking and listening by extending their vocabulary in a relatively freely structured practice class. A group of female Sri Lankan students have, in particular, made notable progress in increasing their vocabulary, grammar accuracy and confidence by taking advantage of the opportunity to develop their English which the Talk Shop offers.

James Vass is an enthusiastic ESOL volunteer teacher, currently responsible for teaching a class for absolute beginner students, and runs the Talk Shop.

The ESOL 1 Class is on Saturday 9.30-11.00 and the Talk Shop is between 11.00 and 12.00.



AFRIL encourages the students to develop their confidence in speaking and listening by extending their vocabulary in a relatively freely structured practice class and fun activities.



Advice Service

AFRIL's advice service continues to enable refugees and asylum seekers to access their legal and social rights and entitlements through the provision of advice on welfare benefits, housing, asylum support and debt. In the last three months, we have assisted 73 individuals and provided more than 200 appointments. We have raised almost £100,000 for our clients in welfare benefits and asylum support.

The advice service is in the process of launching a new Befriending scheme, matching volunteers with some of our most vulnerable clients to provide ongoing weekly support in the form of a practical friendship.

However, the new year has brought new challenges and the advice service continues to adapt to meet the needs of our clients. We are seeing increased numbers of destitute clients and there appear to be growing administrative delays in accessing benefits and support. Our clients are finding it increasingly difficult to access legal advice through legal aid and we are concerned that proposed changes in the availability of legal help for housing, immigration and welfare will mean our clients are further marginalized and unable to access their legal rights.



Volunteer Testimony

As you know voluntary work is a beautiful thing. You go into it because you want to do it. There is nothing at your back that is pressurizing you unlike contracted employment. The fact that you are contributing to your own community or to people that need your skills and time should make you love it more. In my situation I can say I'm the one who is at the receiving end in other words what I benefit from volunteering is more than what I give out.

When I joined AFRIL as a volunteer I believed that everything in life was failing me. The destitution and mental trauma was weakening me mentally, physically, and spiritually. At one point there was nothing that could make me feel alive, I feel like I was a different person. I was extra emotionally sensitive which even stopped me from watching TV by myself. At first prayers and reading the Quran and visiting the mosque used to help until I started to notice the usual silence in the mosque. Going to the mosque everyday almost 12 hours a day was not helping again so I then started going jogging in the park and regular visits to the library. This one too could not help at the end. All this was due to the fact that I was only looking at those negative things happening in my life and communicating with that dark shadow living within me. And this day of change came when I was on the phone with Abi, who suggested that I could volunteer. That was a very significant day in my life. When I started in AFRIL as a volunteer classroom assistant I realized that my mind was not focusing only on the negative things that has happened to me, but I was also reflecting on the activities that had taken place in the classroom and thinking of how I can contribute to the next lessons. The other good thing that was coming out of volunteering was that I was seeing the students as my family members as most of them are in a situation similar to mine. In this I got the opportunity to meet different people and talk to them as I found it difficult to trust people. In a nutshell volunteering was like a like a psychological therapy or rehabilitation.

Something I came to realize when I joined AFRIL was that students appreciated my help more when they knew that I'm an asylum seeker. I went to give a presentation at Durham University with the AFRIL manager, and it was valuable to the audience that they got the chance to hear from me directly and asked me questions on issues affecting us (asylum seekers).

Truly speaking I'm loving volunteering more and more that is why I'm involved in three different organizations. This is giving me my life back at a moderate speed.

Once again thank you for your support and please extend my greetings to all.

Momodou.

Case Study

Mr A is from West Africa. He was granted leave to remain in February 2011. Prior to this social services provided support for Mr A in the form of accommodation and £30 per week because he suffers from severe physical disabilities. Once he was granted leave, Mr A was able to access mainstream benefits and accommodation, so social services referred him to AFRIL for help and terminated his support.

AFRIL provided housing advice and helped Mr A make a homelessness application to Lewisham Council, following which he was given new accommodation. AFRIL also helped Mr A apply for Employment and Support Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Housing Benefit. While Mr A was waiting for his benefit applications to be processed and he had no other form of income, we provided emergency support from the Destitution Fund to allow getting to hospital for life-sustaining treatment.

Thursday Yoga Group

The yoga group takes place every week for one hour: The group is small and personal which means that each student will be guided on a one-one basis in a group session

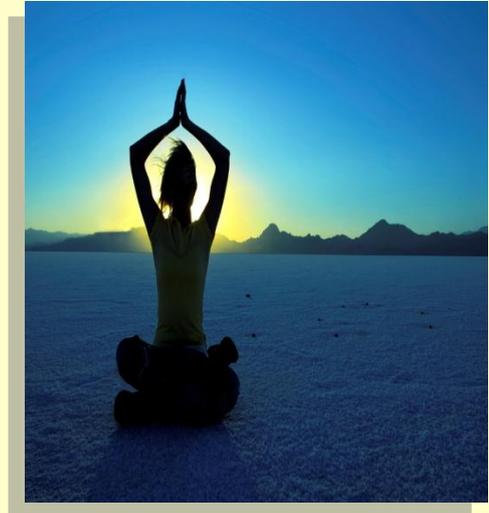
The session takes place in a safe and confidential environment

We work hard, laugh and have lots of fun. This way we find that we get the best results every time: health, relaxation, some pain, fun, and feeling good.

We work on different personal needs, for example if someone in the group needs to lose weight we will work out a system for them so that their weight will begin to fall slowly, become more balanced and stabilize so that no more weight will be gained.

The benefits of the session are; Meditation for calming the mind and a stress free life style; breath work for building on your health and well-being and sleeping well; and relaxation for helping to achieve any personal goals.

All levels are welcome to join at anytime.



AFRIL Sewing Group

The AFRIL sewing group has been running successfully for more than 2 years now and has got a number of regulars as well as new people popping in now and then.

New people with no sewing experience learn how to use a sewing machine and start with small projects. More advanced members of the group can do easy garments or items for the household or their children. Everybody can bring their alterations or own projects and gets advice and help for all sewing problems.

The group members enjoy the creativity, learning new skills and meeting in the group. The group is meeting on Wednesdays from 12:30 to 2:00 pm.

Job description Volunteer for AFRIL Sewing Group

Knowledge and Skills

- Experience in sewing by hand and machine
- Experience in reading paper patterns
- Patience
- Ability to relate with people of all ages and backgrounds
- Flexibility
- Ability to work in a team
- Awareness of health and safety policies
- Regular attendance

Desirable skills and knowledge

- Ability to change paper patterns
- Input of own ideas when familiar with the group



Cake sale



On 16th February, a rainy Wednesday afternoon, two judicious AFRIL volunteers, Athlyn and Clare, and myself set up a cake stall at the Goldsmiths College Stretch Bar; to raise money for AFRIL's most vulnerable clients. The delicious assortment of colourful cakes were kindly made by a talented AFRIL client and proved very popular with students and staff.

The day started off quiet as people hurried to get to class and indoors out of the bad weather. However, as the day went on, and the university corridors started to fill with the noisy chatter of people, we decided to venture out. With the cakes displayed on serving trays we hoped to entice more people to buy and donate, and I am glad to say it worked!

Goldsmiths College has a well known reputation as a left leaning liberal institution so understandably students were eager to know how the government cuts were going to impact the charity.

After a few polite reminders that the charity was not affiliated with a political party there was a lot of support and enthusiasm for the work the charity does. It was a fun day with a lot of informative and interesting discussions. Over the next year with the harsh government cuts and austerity measures being implemented it will be a hard time for charities. Fundraising and similar initiatives which raise money and increase awareness will have an even more vital role. We look forward to keeping you up dated on the creative fundraising projects we come up with.

Can anybody suggest a location for further cake sales? Please get in touch with Iolanda at iolanda@afril.org.uk



2011 Destitution Fund Appeal

We are seeking your help in our 2011 Destitution Fund Appeal. We're asking all our volunteers, staff and trustees to raise at least £25 each through family and friends. If we can meet this target, we'll raise £1,750 towards the Destitution Fund and help support out most vulnerable clients.

Action for Refugees in Lewisham urgently needs cash donations to our Destitution Fund.

This supports people with a weekly income of less than £25, and who have no recourse to public funds - people existing on the margins of society. Every penny of the fund goes directly to meet the basic needs of clients such as buying food, clothes and bus passes. Each year we give out around £3,500.

We already ask a lot of our volunteers, so we aren't asking you for money (though you are very welcome to donate!). We hope that you can ask two or three close friends or family to support our Destitution Fund.

To give to AFRIL, please visit www.afril.org.uk or send a cheque payable to "Action for Refugees in Lewisham" and hand it in at the office.

Here is one client's experience of AFRIL's Destitution Fund:

I am from Uganda. I claimed asylum in 2002 and won my case in 2010.

I was helped and supported by Action for Refugees in Lewisham with both money and advice. The money I got from AFRIL's Destitution Fund helped me to pay for food, bus fares and electricity.

One day when I was given money I had not eaten for three days. I was stuck and stranded. The Destitution Fund helped when I couldn't work or access other support because of my immigration status. After I was granted leave to remain they helped me before my benefits started and before I got a job. AFRIL also helped me with housing and benefits and then helped me to find a job. This organization is helpful to so many people who are in great need. I was supported in every way I needed.

I wouldn't have managed without the help of AFRIL. Without the Destitution Fund I would have gone hungry. I want the organization to be supported to continue the good work.

25 Ways to raise £25 and help support the Destitution Fund!

1. Sell 25 items on [e-bay](#) or from a car boot sale.
2. Write to or email 25 friends explaining why you care about refugees in the UK and tell them how they can donate.
3. Cook/bake 25 brownies, muffins, samosas, etc. and sell them in your office, school or neighborhood.
4. Bring books or DVDs you recommend to work, pool them and then pay £1 to borrow from the pool. Donate the money collected.
5. Pub quiz – ask your local to donate the teams entrance fee to AFRIL. 5 teams paying £5 each = £25!
6. Do a Raffle – ask local businesses to donate the prizes and sell tickets to friends, family and work colleagues.
7. Organize a five a side football tournament and get each team to pay a £5 entrance fee.
8. Organize an indoor games evening with friends and get them to give you £5 each.
9. Get sponsored to do 25 hours of silence.
10. Wash 5 cars in your neighborhood for £5 each.
11. Apply for a license and go basking with friends or shake a bucket at a public collection to raise £25.
12. Hold a tea party for your friends and family and get them to donate a bit of money
13. Tired of your look – shave your head and get sponsored for it!
14. Collect spare change from everyone you know and see how quickly you can fill a jar
15. Give up a guilty pleasure (e.g. smoking, eating chocolate, facebook etc) for 25 days and get your friends/family to sponsor you

Many thanks for your support!

Our supporters

The **co-operative**

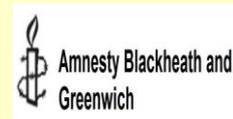


 **Lewisham**



 **Trust for London**

THE SCHWAB AND WESTHEIMER TRUSTS



The Lee Charity
Of
William Hatcliffe

 **Lloyds TSB Foundation**
for England and Wales

The Mrs Smith & Mount Trust

