

Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary

Newsletter No. 1 - January 2019

Welcome to our Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary newsletter which we hope will inspire you and encourage you to share your activities with other schools.

As you may know, there are now over 30 centres of education in our network! These include primary schools, secondary schools, and one college (Halesowen).

Our next networking meeting will be on Thursday 31st January at St Vincent's in Nechells (B7 4HP) 14.30 - 16.30 - these meetings are great opportunities for exchanging information and networking with other schools. If you haven't yet indicated that you are planning to be there, please let me know by e-mail via info@birmingham.cityofsanctuary.org.

Plans for 2019

Two of our schools, The Oaks Primary and Cockshut Secondary, are involved in exciting music programmes with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group. This has encouraged me to approach our contacts at Town Hall / Symphony Hall to propose an event where we will share the achievements of Birmingham as a City of Sanctuary - this would include ESOL, work with libraries and universities, Gardens of Sanctuary, working with our MPs and Councillors, as well as contributions from some of our schools. As soon as there are more details, I'll let you know.

And of course Refugee Week is coming up in June - we are already thinking about how best to support your activities during the period before, during and after the week.

What our schools have been doing

On the next pages there are some reports of some of the activities in our network. Please let me know if you would like to contribute something!

Looking forward to a busy 2019!

Best wishes
Barbara



Open School Doors is an EU funded project whose British partner is Birmingham City University. Several of our schools have taken part in workshops and other activities. Here, *Mary-Rose Puttick* of BCU reports:

Open School Doors is a 2-year (2017-19) Erasmus-plus funded project which spans 5 EU contexts (UK, Germany, Greece, Austria and trans-European) with the overall aim of reducing disparities in learning outcomes for children from refugee, asylum seeker, and newly arrived migration contexts. The project particularly seeks to inspire and motivate teachers and school leaders to create constructive and sustainable relationships and collaboration with parents.

Birmingham City University has worked closely with Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary to carry out the UK data collection and to gain ongoing feedback at each stage of the project. BCU has worked with eight primary and secondary schools across Birmingham, all of which are Schools of Sanctuary. This city-wide collaboration of sanctuary schools, along with the input of the EU partners, has informed the online framework which the BCU team have now developed to train teachers and school leaders. The training framework centres on 3 main themes for schools to work across: 'Spaces and Places', 'Literacies and Digital Literacies' and 'Communities and Cultures'. It is a multimedia framework which incorporates ideas, resources, sound extracts from teachers and parents, videos, presentations, and inspiring practice examples (including those from Schools of Sanctuary across the UK). For the final stage of the project, in 2019, the framework will be rolled out across all Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary. It is hoped that it will be used both by individual school practitioners as a reflective tool and as part of a whole-school holistic approach to develop meaningful and welcoming partnerships with refugee and newly arrived families.

Moseley School and Sixth Form was given the School of Sanctuary Award in July 2018. Assistant Head Teacher Amandeep Kaur reports on their activities during Refugee Week:

Students at Moseley School and Sixth collaborated with Birmingham Human Relief Foundation team on a refugee rights project. The aim of the project focused on Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of a Child, "If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, governments must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all the rights in the Convention".

Human Relief Foundation is an international organisation which promotes sustainable economic and social development by working with local communities through relief and developmental programmes, supporting them to build a better life and find their own solutions to global problems. They work in a number of countries, including in Jordan to support Syrian refugees.

Our students gained a wealth of experience working with Human Relief team. The energy, compassion and leadership that were displayed have been phenomenal. The Birmingham Human Relief team- Abdul Waheed and Shahema Miah have put in tremendous amount of support and time into planning and assisting all the fundraising events and activities for Refugee Week 2018: 20 years of celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees with Human Relief Foundation. During the week we ran a number of refugee awareness events and competitions as well as fundraising activities: Journey of the refugee creative writing competition, Climate Refugee Art Competition, The Big Refugee Debate Competition, Girls Evening, Human Relief vs Moseley football match and Refugee Rights workshops. We raised a total of £1631.43 for Human Relief Foundation to provide aid for Syrian Refugees in Jordan.

Our students had a session about refugees with our local MP Roger Godsiff. The MP spoke to our students about the current situation for refugees in Birmingham, he spoke about the support the council provides for the refugee community. During the question and answer session our students asked questions about refugees in Birmingham and what they can do to help.

Cardinal Wiseman Secondary School joined the Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary network in spring 2018.

Their Sanctuary project involves close links with St Chad's Sanctuary, a place of welcome for asylum-seekers and refugees run jointly by St Chad's Roman Catholic Cathedral and the Salvation Army. In order for the staff to be well-supported in their work with the pupils, every member of staff has visited St Chad's Sanctuary and been given time to reflect on their experience there. Here you can read about some of their activities and reflections.

In the summer of 2018, every member of staff was released from part of his or her timetable for the day, to visit in small groups the Sanctuary at St. Chad's in the city centre of Birmingham. We went to see, experience and learn; to meet extraordinary people with extraordinary stories and to open our hearts and minds to what we could do in and through our school and the opportunities already granted us. So we began our Sanctuary School Project.

We reflected on our responses to our Sanctuary visits, collected our thoughts, displayed and even on occasion performed some of them; twice spent CPD time together with staff from the Sanctuary; invited our new friends to visit our school in their turn, meeting and speaking with so many of our pupils on their tours and assemblies. Some of our students visited the Sanctuary too and we celebrated Refugee week with new understanding and compassion. Initiated and inspired by one of our pupils, we now have the beginnings of a donation station for food and clothing, and, in already choosing to welcome into our community so many young people from both distant and painful circumstances, we are considering what it might now mean for us to grow into and become a *School of Sanctuary*.

In Cardinal Newman's prayer, we are reminded that each one of us is asked, and needed, to be an angel of peace in our own place, a link in a chain, a bond of connections between persons. We cannot change all things in the world around us we know, but we can work to extend our mission towards those margins within reach and also to those already within, trusting again, each day, that every person in our community is Christ among us.

Some comments from staff:

My experience was probably a little different, inasmuch as my job at school means I meet people who are newly arrived and of refugee status on a weekly, almost daily basis.....We have had refugee children, unaccompanied minors, a child from Grenfell Tower, children in care. All of them with horrific stories which the majority of staff do not know about. Part of me feels relieved that they can all now see what I have seen and heard. It is a topic we can openly discuss and have empathy and understanding for people who are here due to fearing for theirs' and their family's lives. In my humble opinion, I feel we have long been a Sanctuary. And this is the beauty of Cardinal Wiseman School. We have 47 languages and children of every faith and colour in school.

I found the St Chad's Sanctuary a very humbling experience. The session I was at was a drop-in session so no one had any idea who was going to arrive if anyone. A few of the people had brought a notebook with them so that they could write new words and learn them when they left the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary had a lovely friendly atmosphere. Everyone helped each other in particular with language barriers. For me it was humbling and it opened my eyes to all of the many difficulties these people have had to overcome. How little they have and how young they are!