

Meeting Point

"The Meeting Point team is a source of inspiration and encouragement to all of us - we love and appreciate you all!"

Project Manager's report (Emma Crossley)

Meeting Point celebrated a momentous 20-year anniversary this year – a wonderful achievement for such a fabulous project. To mark the occasion, we put on an open celebratory drop-in, opening it up to other organisations and the local community, resulting in quite a remarkable afternoon of community cohesion, food, music, magic and dancing. Thank you to the team who made it possible, and for all those involved in any way, shape, or form over the past 20 years. You all made it possible!

All in all, it has been a positive year for Meeting Point, but once again the global and national picture has been disruptive. The war in Ukraine has continued and once more, as I write this, we see conflict and horrendous tragedy taking place in the Middle East. Thousands of desperate people continue to seek sanctuary in the UK, met by an increasingly hostile and dysfunctional immigration policy environment. Often it is small front line third sector organisations that have to deal with the forefront of this and here at Meeting Point, we have seen higher numbers than ever before coming to us for support.

Early in the year we were delighted to partner with ChildsSide to run a series of Life in the UK workshops for Ukrainian and other families new to the UK on integration and family life in the UK. We were also excited to welcome medical students to the drop-in to run CPR training to the community as part of their 'Restart a Heart' campaign. Other new additions included having The Growth Company run outreach clinics at the project, focussing on employment and housing support for refugees, as well as visits from MESMAC (sexual health and HIV testing) and Citizens UK who build grass roots social justice campaigns. Meeting Point is a small team and we could not provide the level of support that we do without our working partners, so a big thank you to all who have worked alongside us this year.



household items are all amazing'.



'Such a lovely place to be. You just come here and smile and say hello. The food, the clothes and

Staff and volunteers

The staff team, and a large proportion of the volunteer team, has remained unchanged this year. Some volunteers have moved on or found employment but we have several other new starters who have settled in well. We have also welcomed students on placement from both Leeds Trinity and Leeds Beckett Universities. We are proud to retain such a committed and diverse volunteer team, approximately half of which are beneficiaries, and welcome approximately 25 on Mondays and 10 on Wednesdays, to keep the project running as it does.



A few words from our current volunteer representative, Anne McCaffrey:

Meeting Point continues to have a fantastic team of volunteers. On a Monday there are a consistent team of regular volunteers turning up, working hard and most importantly providing a friendly welcome to the beneficiaries.

The volunteers have various roles including driving to supermarkets to collect food donations and then working with the donations to provide the beneficiaries with hot and cold food to eat at the drop in and food parcels to take home. Two volunteers teach English each week. Two volunteers register new beneficiaries and provide support and advice. A group of volunteers always sorts and supervises the giving out of clothing, period products and household items.

The volunteers all say they are very happy in their roles. The roles are changed for those who like to try different things, this way they can then learn about the different aspects of the drop-in. Two new volunteers have been recruited from Trinity University since March. They have settled in well also enjoy the work.

This February a celebration for volunteers was held after the drop-in with a visiting magician and free pizzas for dinner. The volunteers appreciated this event which was a way of thanking them for their continued support.

A piece from our volunteer Helen Ford:

I really enjoy being a volunteer at The Meeting Point. I love being part of the team: there is laughter, news, a bit of friendly teasing and some interesting cross-cultural conversations while we work together. I mostly help in the kitchen, and each week is a surprise to know what food has come – but peeling lots of eggs for egg mayonnaise sandwiches is a regular fixture! We know how much The Meeting Point is needed, as beneficiaries pour in during the afternoon, keen to eat, collect food bags, choose clothes and goods and get advice. It is a reminder of the hard life of an asylum seeker when someone says (fairly frequently) 'I'm so hungry' and when those egg mayonnaise sandwiches all disappear.

A piece from our volunteer Lucy Holloway:

I have been volunteering with Meeting Point for over a year, and hope to continue for many more. It's a diverse group of lovely people, working together to make donations stretch as far as possible to help people of all ages, who are sadly often vulnerable and unfairly vilified. I've volunteered with various charities and organisations, including other asylum seeker/refugee charities, and none have done what Meeting Point does in creating such a safe, welcoming place for people in the most difficult of circumstances to spend time together, relax, and hopefully get some relief and respite. Much as I would prefer it if an organisation like Meeting Point did not need to exist, while it does, I hope they can continue to do the excellent work they've been doing for over two decades, and that they receive the recognition they deserve. I am grateful that I get to be a part of it.

A few words from our beneficiary representative, Alesya Moisenko

We are receiving a great support and understanding from both staff and volunteers. They are there to help and make our day nice, and feeling as a family gives us strength to the week ahead. I look forward to Mondays...my best day of the week! We feel looked after. They are amazing people that look after us; what a great support when you need it. Staff and volunteers are the very best to help and support us.



'Your whole team can rightly feel proud to have reached this milestone: it's not easy for any small charity to keep going year after year. So well done!'

Monday Provision

"I always feel welcome here, that's what makes this place so special,"

The drop-in continues to be a safe social space for refugees and asylum seekers to come and meet and access support. At the drop-in clients can access hot and cold food that we prepare on site, as well as refreshments, food parcels, toiletries, period products, clothing, and household goods. They can also access advocacy and support, hardship payments and the opportunity to meet with other organisations there in outreach capacity – employment support/ refugee projects/ advocacy.



Food is sourced from local supermarkets (via Fareshare and Neighbourly redistribution programmes); donated by The Headingley Greengrocer as well as from the local community.

Numbers benefiting from our provision have increased this year to the highest it's ever been. In the year ending 31st March 2024, we had 4917 visits to the drop-in by 653 individuals and welcomed 318 new clients to the project (these figures are double what they were ten years ago). We gave out 3619 food parcels, 4930 meals, thousands of clothing items, 384 hardship payments, 2728 bus tickets and 2003 period products. 3337 contact visits were also held, supporting clients with a range of advocacy and support issues. In addition to this, a number beneficiaries were helped with 'My New Home' deliveries, supporting their transition from one home to another. More than ever were helped with deliveries of items for a new baby and referrals were made to Leeds Baby Bank, Baby Basics, Leeds North West Foodbank, Reduce Reuse Kids Clothes Project, and Give a Gift. In partnership with Christ Church, the Christian giving platform Acts 435 helped 65 of our clients with cash needs for various items.



We anticipate need to increase in 2024/25, as the cost of living crisis continues to affect us all and the environment for asylum seekers and refugees becomes ever more hostile and challenging.

"These kind people didn't stop caring for us and this thought, this love, I will keep carrying with me as I go."

English classes

The face-to-face English classes have continued this year and have been held twice a week with two different teachers. The classes are on Mondays 1-2pm and on Wednesdays 10.15 – 11.45am. The classes now have consistently 10-14 students each. On a Monday there is a volunteer classroom assistant who has also taken the class independently when the Monday teacher has been away.

The first languages of the students are: Ukrainian, Pushto (Afghanistan), Kurdish (Iraq), Amharic (Ethiopia), Women from Afghanistan form the majority of the students in both classes. Two teenagers have been attending with their mother while they wait for school places. They make very rapid progress in class.

This year there has been a continued focus on teaching the students to say, write and spell their names, addresses and phone numbers. This is an essential skill for many situations in everyday life and also very important in emergency situations. Progress has been slow as many of the women are not literate in their mother tongue and do not have the experience of holding a pen and forming letters. The purchase of white boards and dry wipe marker pens has helped a lot with this activity. All students can now say their names and addresses clearly. Other vocabulary has been covered e.g. food, clothing, household items, colours. Verbs and pronouns have been taught and the students can form simple sentences and ask simple questions in class. There is some carry over to everyday situations as witnessed by a member of staff over hearing one of the students speaking English in a local supermarket.



Women's Group (Judith Shalkowski – Project Worker)

The Women's Group at Meeting Point had a most wonderful and eventful year with many opportunities organised by the team, including via partner organisations providing women with new skills and activities. While some women move on to education, volunteering and employment, new women join the group and benefit from making new friends and enjoying each other. We continue to plan and each week benefit from a healthy lunch and activities over the two hours on Wednesdays.



This year we held the following activities: BINGO (learning more English with our word BINGO games and prizes); Pamper (also with henna and haircuts, and children's activities); Crafts - cardmaking, lantern making, sewing, knitting, crocheting, jewellery making; Singing - with LUUMIC university students and the New Connections Project; Cooking and baking – (banana bread is one of our favourites and we even sold some on our Christmas stall (unique gifts made - raising funds for our Christmas lunch together); Sculpture workshops and Henry Moore Institute (guided trip to an amazing Art Exhibition);

Health and Wellbeing - mindfulness, art journals, prayer times, health talks, gut health, and house plant care.

In May to July, over 18 women were involved in an amazing project, New Connections, with Leeds Conservatoire and Orchestra Live which meant weeks of writing songs, practicing and singing for a concert performance in Leeds. Ten of the women performed the songs they wrote and were accompanied by the orchestra who learned and performed the music. They were grateful for the exciting opportunity to create new music and take part in such a dynamic project.



Once again, at the end of the school year, over 50 beneficiaries including their children were able to travel by train to North Yorkshire and enjoy a day of play with BINGO games, lunch and face painting, thanks to the volunteers at Impulse Decisions and St Roberts Church, Pannal. Everyone went home feeling so cared about and with some lovely gifts, ice lollies and prizes. Summer activities also involved paying for and getting families signed up to BREEZE events near their homes and accompanying women without children to visit museums near Meeting Point.



In February half term, the team supported a Leeds city trip for over 50 adults and 50 children to attend free activities: Leeds City Museum, Leeds City Library, and the Playhouse. The women received further information on how to access other museums and activities across Leeds and info on transportation.

All activities at Women's Group are planned involving the women themselves and taking account of their interests, and over 58 were able to benefit greatly this year. We are always impressed with the skills of beneficiaries themselves, which they bring and share with each other.

The team continues to provide a range of skills including preparing and serving lunch, welcoming and registering, casework, caring for children, leading activities, alongside the

responsibilities to prepare and tidy away the venue. Partners and visitors remark on the friendly and multi-cultural activities present and the women work to promote Meeting Point as a charity to their friends and contacts.

In the future, we plan to help women to access further opportunities such as: personal and home safety and repair, child safety, female health, local trips, IT instruction, and gentle exercise.

Leeds Together for Ukraine Fund - Life in the UK Workshops, in partnership with ChildsSide

In June, as part of the Leeds Together for Ukraine Fund, 45 Meeting Point beneficiaries engaged with one of three workshops, led by ChildsSide CIC.

Individual women and parents benefited from reduced isolation and information on UK opportunities, up-to-date info on parenting in the UK, and links to local and national organisations to support their new life in the UK. Community interpreters facilitated dynamic conversations and supported the four languages per workshop. The events provided refreshments, free bus passes, and extra resources as well as childcare to 15 children. Participants engaged well, provided overwhelmingly positive comments, evaluated the sessions as excellent and went away with helpful resources.



“Having been for the first ChildsSide programme this has been like a recall or refreshing my mind on what to do if I cannot figure out if I am stuck. So this has been so helpful that I’m going home with new approaches on how to manage my struggles and very hopeful.”

“This event taught me how to live in this country more easily. Thank you very much.”

The Allotment

Meeting Point has had an allotment plot on a local site for a number of years and this year has seen huge development of the space. It has been a place of sanctuary and tranquility, improving the mental and physical health of the volunteers and beneficiaries involved. We have all benefited from the delicious fresh produce harvested from it too!



Summer Trips

"This is my summer and it's started off with a very special day! My children are so happy and that makes me happy, too, thank you!"

During the summer we were delighted to return to Scarborough with a large group of beneficiaries. We also had a wonderful day out to our friends of St Roberts Church, Pannal, as well as supporting our families to attend the Council Breeze events in and around the city parks.



Case Study

Across the past year, we saw a rise in the needs of women and their children. As families received notice of their leave to remain, they often were moved to temporary housing. One family found themselves unable to get their children to school and their accommodation was not suitable for their young children, without meals, laundry and transportation. More than ever, families needed advocacy and support to explain their problems. Often families were moved to accommodations that were moldy and difficult for children, all crowded into one room together. The project worker was able to support two families to move into more suitable housing and access support to continue education and help for basic needs.

Looking ahead

We are looking forward to another busy year ahead, and have secured funding from Leeds City Council Migration Partnership Fund to help support our work. We are looking forward to working alongside local Universities to offer students placements at the project, as well as working with local and city wide partners to help bring a varied and appropriately tailored programme of support services and activities. Thank you to everyone who has made this year possible; we certainly could not have done it without you!