



*After a long journey
comes friendship*

REFUGEE & MIGRANT CENTRE

Dear Friends and Supporters of West London Welcome,

Where to begin? So much has happened since we last wrote to you over the summer, from moving into our new premises, to welcoming hundreds of Afghans to West London and walking with Little Amal. We have lots of news and updates for you, first and foremost about our wonderful new home...

Our new community centre

We're thrilled to report that our new centre in Hammersmith is alive and running and already much-loved by our community. The Leslie Aldridge Trust have very generously funded our renovations. After a number of painting and decorating parties with our members (big thanks to Farrow and Ball for the paint donations and to so many locals for the furniture and lovely furnishings we needed!), we opened our doors last month and immediately felt at home.

Our new space features a large space for English classes and communal dining, offices for our admin and advice sessions, a chill-out sofa area (looking colourful and awesome thanks to Knit for Peace donations), a children's play area, storage, a soon-to-be-ready kitchen, and best of all our own garden. We've already been making the absolute most of our new spaces by playing cricket outside with Fulham Cricket Club, screenprinting t-shirts with volunteers Rachel and Cat, and welcoming in the Flying Seagulls Circus. It's a rare and wonderful thing to find a space that fulfills all our needs, but we've done it!

We're busy gardening together in our outside spaces thanks to generous donations from Chiswick Community Allotments, Chelsea Flower Show and some wonderful grasses from the legend that is Knoll Gardens. Gardening has been particularly lovely for those in our community who were used to gardening in their home countries. Our kitchen is going to be ready imminently, which will allow for our chef Aisha and the fabulous kitchen team to cook to their heart's delight - and for asylum-seeking people living in hotels without kitchens to cook themselves meals.

Next month we'll start opening three days a week: on Tuesdays our Outreach Coordinator Mehri will run our free clothing shop and social time for asylum-seeking people living in local hotels; on Wednesdays we'll run a variety of creative classes including knitting, yoga, art and meditation; and on Thursday we'll continue with our usual day centre where people receive holistic support from legal advice and housing casework to English classes, our foodbank, hot lunch, social time, creative activities and sport.

Welcoming Afghans and other new arrivals

Back in August we had the privilege of welcoming newly-arrived Afghans into West London, where hundreds of evacuees are living in bridging hotels while they wait for permanent housing elsewhere. We organised a warm welcome for the Afghans, have been working with the council and a variety of local groups including the wonderful parents, teachers and students at Emanuel School to organise donations and support, and have brought Afghan families into our community. Distressingly the Afghans we know are none the wiser as to when they will be properly housed and have been living without any money or documentation since they first arrived - our Director Joanne and our Afghan member Zia spoke about the ongoing uncertainty faced by Afghans [on ITV News](#), and our Deputy Director Leyla spoke about the same issues [on the BBC](#).

[PRIVATE LANDLORDS are desperately needed to provide homes for Afghans](#) to get them out of bridging hotels. Please contact us if you have a self-contained flat or house of any size.



Walking with Little Amal

This past weekend we were unbelievably proud to be the flag-bearers for Little Amal, the giant refugee child puppet who has walked across Europe to find her mother and seek sanctuary, as she was welcomed by hundreds of people at St Paul's Cathedral and around London. Our volunteer, Phyllida Lloyd, directed the welcome ceremony brilliantly with hundreds of children singing *Consider Yourself* from *Oliver Twist* – not a dry eye amongst the adult crowd of spectators. Our community of refugees, migrants and volunteers will never forget being part of such an inspiring, joyful and moving day. We also partied with Little Amal at the Roundhouse in Camden together, and some of our families loved meeting her at the V&A. You can see pictures of our time with Little Amal on Twitter [here](#).

Community Outings



As ever, we've been busy running trips around London with the help of our fab volunteers. Recently we had an incredible time rocking out to Tina the Musical (all thanks to our volunteer Phyllida who directed that as well!), visited Kew Gardens, the Sky Garden, Tower Bridge, St Katherine's Docks, gone to the V&A, had a tour of Chiswick House with a wonderful lunch thanks to UCL, and stayed local on the gorgeous Hammersmith riverside.

Chiswick satellite group

For nearly a year now, our Chiswick satellite group have been supporting their asylum-seeking neighbours with a weekly community gathering. This group is a joyful lifeline for those part of it, and shows how much locals can do together by just meeting up and making things happen.

Chiswick is home to two large hotels which are used as temporary accommodation for families, unaccompanied teenagers, single and pregnant women - all of whom are seeking asylum and have made long and difficult journeys to reach the UK to escape extreme situations in their home country. Members of this community are particularly vulnerable and often traumatised. Although the hotels are clean and safe, many people are left for months without any financial support from the Government, no ability to cook the food they like, and often feel very isolated and alone.

At the Chiswick 'Welcome Afternoon', asylum seekers and their children can join a communal safe space, eat together, have some English conversation, play some games and make friends. Help is given to register for schools and GP's and signposting to other services. They provide support (both emotional and practical) for pregnant women, mothers and their babies - including supplying baby grows, nursing bras and pushchairs. For those with no money, phone credit vouchers are given and pre-loaded Oyster cards for important appointments.

You can donate to support our work in Chiswick on Localgiving [here](#).

Rallying against the Nationality and Borders Bill

We joined hundreds of friends and allies for the Refugees Welcome rally against the Nationality and Borders Bill at Parliament Square last week. The Government's new Bill, dubbed the 'Anti-Refugee Bill', will only serve to deepen the already hostile environment towards refugees and migrants. If passed, it will attack the 70-year-old Refugee Convention by punishing people by the means of their arrival, creating a two-tier system of treatment of asylum seekers based on whether they travelled here by 'formal' or 'informal' routes. Most of you will know that there are currently no safe or legal routes for people to get here, so people we know have been forced to take very dangerous journeys by boat. We were proud to come together with other routes to defend the right for people to seek

safety by any means. You can see pictures of us the rally on Twitter [here](#), and you can read in more detail about what the passing of the Bill would mean on the JCWI website [here](#).

Joanne and Betul talk food

For your listening pleasure: Joanne and Betul, an asylum-seeking member of our community, talked to the Lecker podcast about the role of food at West London Welcome, from its importance at our centre to how asylum-seeking people get by living in hotels without kitchens for months on end. You can listen to the episode on the Lecker website [here](#) or on Apple podcasts [here](#).

How you can help....

Donations

There are more people depending on our support than ever. We depend hugely on regular and on-off donations to pay our staff, the rent for our new premises, give out hardship money and travel expenses for people to travel to us, buy laptops and phones for people, and cover the costs for all the wonderful creative things we do together. If you'd like to support us, you can donate on our Localgiving page: <https://localgiving.org/charity/westlondonwelcome/>

Or if you are interested in becoming a member of our Welcome Circle please see the brochure attached below.

For Common Good

You can buy us physical goods we need via the For Common Good website, where we post our latest physical requirements: forcommongood.co.uk/pages/west-london-welcome

Physical donations

We have moved our free clothing shop at St Mary's Church, and will be opening to an appointments-only system for free clothes at our centre. If you have physical donations you'd like to donate, please email Mehri, our Outreach Coordinator: mehri@westlondonwelcome.com

Fundraise for us

Are you running a marathon or competing in any other kind of challenge? You can fundraise for us. Head to our Localgiving page, click on 'Fundraise For Us' on the right hand side, and follow the instructions. Email us at hello@westlondonwelcome.com with any queries.

Volunteer Roles:

Bookkeeper, creche helper, kitchen supervisor on Tuesdays and/or Wednesdays

Follow us on social media

We're very active on social media, so do follow us if you aren't already:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/wlondonwelcome>

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/westlondonwelcome>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/westlondonwelcome>

Thank you so, so much to you all for your ongoing amazing support.

Yours sincerely,

Joanne MacInnes & Leyla Williams