

BIASAN

newsletter & annual report

2019-20



Covid-19

This is really a story for next year's newsletter. Many tales will emerge, good and bad.

We closed all our public gatherings from 12 March, by unanimous decision in a special meeting, to protect members, volunteers and public health.

Then followed hours and hours of hard work online and on the phone setting up and agreeing contact networks to make sure all our members and as many other refugees and asylum seekers knew how to keep themselves and others safe and were fed, equipped and cared for as well as possible.

The BIASAN English teaching team have worked their socks off to set up and publicise online English classes which will continue until we are able to meet face to face again. Luckily Robert and Ahmed are tech whizzes. For details see 'useful info' section on page 15.

We are also working with other refugee agencies in Bradford. Bradford Council was quick to act, efficient and kind as were many others. Bradford Foundation Trust/Faith Centre is a vital engine of help. People have also been referred to our helpers by other groups.

City of Sanctuary consultation

We were doing an exercise, with Will representing C of S, to find out what information people were given about Bradford when they first arrived, who gave it to them, and what they weren't told that they later realised would have been useful. This is to help the Council and C of S organise induction sessions for new arrivals. Lots of interesting answers but Nurat's was the best - Hackney Advice Centre had given her our information. Will says C of S's share all their info so this can happen.

(Today I had an email from Crisis in Croydon checking that the info they had on us was correct, for a bloke who's just got Refugee status and is being relocated here).
Maggie

Two brief descriptions of Dales trips follow: there were several others, photos of which appear throughout

Scargill Residential

I spent a few days at a residential with a group from BIASAN. We've been on walks, explored the garden, the top of the estate, into Kettlewell, watched the birds congregate and feed, watched a movie, played games, arts etc. We watched the fabulous lace makers creating artwork and had a lot of lovely food. It was very peaceful and relaxing. I had a lovely time, along with my group. It's been great to get away into the lovely Yorkshire Dales.
Mo

Wensleydale Creamery visit

This was one of our most popular trips, even though it rained. Mo is planning another one for when life gets back to 'normal'. Cheese samples were greatly appreciated.
Amanda

The Royal Visit

I was really pleased and honoured to have represented BIASAN and as an artist at the visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to the Khidmat Centre. I was invited by Kaneez Khan of Near Neighbours, as we have been previous recipients of grants. It was a great opportunity to be involved and included in the amazing roundup of grassroots organisations. It was personally an honour and privilege to gift the royals with artwork created on a project, as a token of friendship from all of the groups involved.

It made my day, as I'm sure it did for all the groups. Really showed me how we are valued as an organisation and as an artist which has value too. A lovely day, and well planned out.

Some of the organisations involved:
Touchstone, BEAP, BD5 Dads, UK Butterflies, Good Shepherd Centre, Millside Centre, BYO. *Mo*

Amanda adds: William and Kate were most interested in BIASAN, sympathetic to the cause, and asked Mo what she thought of the 'hostile environment'.



Welcoming refugees and asylum seekers

Instead of the Editor's usual rather dull summary of what BIASAN is and does, which after all bursts out of these pages without the Editor saying anything, here is Michael's fine summary of his thoughts on seven short films about young refugees shown at Leeds Town Hall in November, hosted by Migration Yorkshire to launch their report on welcoming refugees.

These films relate particularly to young refugees and asylum seekers but Michael's reflections apply equally well to those of all ages. It is important to remember that vastly different cultural experience can cause as much confusion and difficulty for people as language.

Some of the points that I particularly noted from the films and the ensuing discussion:

Refugees crave their national food

They have a strong need for "family"

Personal access to the internet is essential

They experience very different treatment from the police in transit countries

Social interaction (with English speakers) is a big help towards integration

Emotional support is vital

Written summary in the published report highlights 5 key priorities:

The significance of living with carers who care

Having free and accessible internet

The challenge of having too much free time, and how it relates to young people's pasts and outlook towards the future

Learning English and receiving factual information (eg. legal matters)

Recommendations:

Create opportunities for them to socialise with peers who speak English fluently (eg. youth organisations)

Generate tailored volunteering opportunities for them that match their individual needs

Ensure young people living independently have free, regular and reliable access to the internet.

Generate culturally sensitive training, as well as training on the asylum process, and encourage practitioners and carers to attend prior to beginning to look after young people

Ensure young people understand the role and responsibilities of carers and other professionals in their lives towards them, make sure they understand the content of what is being discussed when it relates to them (eg. at doctors or solicitors)

Be flexible and creative in communication in informal settings.

The digital stories are available to view on <https://vimeo.com/showcase/5852135> and I have a copy of the full research report.

Michael

BIASAN offers:
a warm welcome
practical advice
legal advice
English tuition
good food
the chance to meet people from all over the world
a safe place to relax
a women-only safe space for those who need and want it
referrals to other useful agencies
outings where all kinds of strange things may be found (see Ibrahim's first sight of seaside donkeys)
the discovery that many British people are on your side
and above all the chance to forget your mountain of worries for a while



A letter from Maggie

"I've been involved with BIASAN for over 20 years. During that time I've met many wonderful, inspirational people. I've learned a lot about the geography, politics and general life-styles that people have left behind.

I've been privileged to see families reunited, weddings happen, and babies born. I've attended citizenship ceremonies and reunion parties.

I've seen young people grow up, go to University and enter into careers.

People have moved away, but kept in touch.

Obviously it's not all been plain sailing. There have been bitter legal decisions made. I've seen people who have had to wait for a decision for many years change from sparky, bright young individuals into depressed, sad people with serious mental health issues. Others have been removed to their countries of origin, often with devastating results.

Along with others in BIASAN I've attended a number of funerals. In times of adversity we've all tried to give whatever help and comfort we can - that's what BIASAN is there for.

During my time at BIASAN

I've undertaken a number of duties as well as the standard ones. In recent years I've ensured the smooth running of the Drop-In Centre; kept the internal email list; prepared the agenda for the monthly Big Meeting ensuring the meetings were chaired and minuted; and I've acted as a contact point for outside organisations who needed to get in touch with us. The job I've enjoyed doing most is quite simply welcoming people at the door.

The organisation is a purely voluntary organisation. It has never had paid staff and relies solely on volunteers, including refugees themselves. Whilst working within the organisation I've learned a lot about tolerance of other people's views, and consequently I've made friendships with people I would not normally have come into contact with.

I can't stress how proud I am of the way our BIASAN volunteers are continuing to give help during this Coronavirus Pandemic. *[Full report on Covid-19 response in next year's newsletter - Ed]*

I have suffered a number of health problems over the last 10 years but always managed to bounce back and keep going. However, early this year I became registered blind with a Serious Sight Impairment. While I'm fine in myself, I'm obviously having to make major adjustments. Whilst I will continue coming to BIASAN I'm stepping back from my previous duties. I do so knowing I am leaving the organisation in good hands. Thank you all for being there."

Maggie

[Maggie's letter is also a great introduction to BIASAN for readers who don't know us (yet). The following pages will show you a vast selection of our activities - Ed]



Fellow volunteers Zara and Mo with Maggie (l to r)



While we're on the subject of volunteers: our post-Christmas meal at a lovely Iranian restaurant. Too many to fit in the photos - apologies to those squeezed out



Our community activities



Hawa is our very reliable doorkeeper



Our barber Majid is kept very busy

BIASAN is represented on these groups:

Multidisciplinary Team for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Operational Group, which includes the police and all other agencies involved with refugees and asylum seekers

Bradford Refugee Forum

Interfaith groups

People in the Dales Project

FGM/Peacemakers International

We took part in Refugee Week 15-23 June 2019:

Sat 15 Telling my Story workshop at Bradford Media Museum

10th Anniversary of People in the Dales Project (Grassington Festival)

Walk for Work along the canal to Leeds. Money raised for BIASAN and Beacon emergency accommodation

Bradford Friendship Choir, many BIASAN members sing

BIASAN Refugee Week and 20th anniversary party

Humanising Exhibition at Kala Sangham, open till July. Mo artist co-ordinator. Powerful and moving portraits of BIASAN members

The rest of the year:

BIASAN poetry at Waterstones for Bradford Literature Festival, part of Hope Not Hate event

City of Sanctuary consultation

Talk at Industrial Museum 'Cultural Voices' with Mo, Zara and Amanda

Open Iftar

Hiroshima Day 10 Aug. We made paper doves at BIASAN. Remembrance event with Lord Mayor Norfolk Gardens. Parade to Lister Park and picnic

Bradford Refugee Forum event – members invited to discuss what they want from the Forum. 19 September after BIASAN. BRF represents every refugee/asylum seeker group in Bradford

Parceval Hall residential

Community Get Togethers – Rockwell Centre, Family Sports Day Parkside Centre with meal, Wibsey Community Garden

Wensleydale Creamery outing

La Bohème Leeds Town Hall

Ribblehead walk

Talk on BIASAN at Design Exchange Mo

Royal Visit

Community Get Together Bangladeshi Youth Organisation

Welcoming Refugees Migration Yorkshire at Leeds Town Hall

Letter signing by Freedom from Torture to government protesting against bad asylum decisions

Global Bradford Dominican Association - our Journeys exhibition

Annual seaside trip - this time to Filey

Bronte Museum visit with lunch and stroll

To organise all this we have a Big Meeting with all volunteers and members once a month and quarterly volunteers' meetings. Members are encouraged to chair meetings and take an active part.

We have compiled an information sheet translated into several languages for members and volunteers about what we do and how to do it safely and well.

See inside for articles and photos about some of these activities. There's not room to write about all of them!

FOLLOW OUR FACEBOOK PAGE:

[facebook.com/BiasanYorkshire](https://www.facebook.com/BiasanYorkshire)

There's loads on it and it's always bang up to date

Refugee Week 2019



We always have a party for Refugee Week but 2019 was our 20th anniversary too

Grandad: Arrival

My grandad was the first to arrive
 To leave his homeland and serve in a foreign land
 The same country which depleted my ancestral links
 The same country which uprooted a whole civilisation in the name of Freedom
 Creating a monster whilst the survivors are still living its legacy
 I am the third generation, of the first born Desis in the UK
 Still fighting for a nation's survival
 Regardless of ethnicity
 I know I'm still a child of a migration culture
 Still bound by invisible rules and regulations
 Not marked out for the general populace
 Unless you sell your soul, forgo your roots and uphold Britishness
 Britishness made on the backs of immigrants, migrants and changemakers
 Those seeking a better destiny when called to a new land, a new world
 Where seekers of adventures, explorers of new worlds arrived
 Seemed possible beyond their wildest dreams
 Until the bitterness of a racist nation hit, crippled by its own illusions & fear
 Grippled many by its snarly smile and baring teeth
 Exposing those seeking a better life
 To an unwelcomed welcome

Mussarat Rahman 2020

Our evening meal

Helen thanks cooks and helpers



On Thursday evenings we provide a hot meal for between 80 and 100 people. This has been part of the BIASAN tradition for the past 20 years, although the numbers have risen very considerably. When I first joined BIASAN in 2001, the chief Cook was a wonderful lady called Mussarat, from Pakistan. She would start cooking at 4 o'clock and by six the meal was ready to serve. In those early days I was working full time and often felt tired at the end of a working day, but the thought of Mussarat's wonderful food kept me going to BIASAN, and once I had eaten, revived, I was able to take part in the life of the BIASAN family.

A few years on I took on responsibility for organising the rota of cooks, and facilitating the cooking process - often by delivering saucepans to people's houses and then collecting them, full of food, to bring back to the drop in. This led to many interesting exchanges and the chance to get to know people better. Over the years we have had meals cooked by people of all nationalities, asylum seekers, refugees, English volunteers. We always aim to provide a delicious hot meal, with choices including vegetarian and vegan.

This year thanks are due to two semi professional cooks from Nigeria, Nurat and Rosita, who now take it in turns to cook on the first Thursday of the month. Nurat's mother ran a canteen, so she learned at her mother's knee, and I have never seen anyone move so quickly between cooker and sink to keep on top of the

washing up as she goes along. Thanks also to Mark McChesney, who cooks once a month, and to Chintha and Harald, and the Holy Family Sisters with Heather Grinter, who cook on the third Thursday of the month. Congratulations to Chinta and Herral and their son Lochana, who finally got leave to remain this year after ten years of trying. We are so pleased that they can finally begin to make plans for the future.

Thanks also to Alex Chipatiko and all the Zimbabwean ladies who make up his team to provide us with a banquet on the last Thursday of the month. Working alongside all the cooks this year has been Mohammed, from Yemen, who worked as a professional chef back home, specialising in the cooking of rice. Coming right after the English class, the meal attracts long queues, and it is often difficult to find somewhere to sit.

I cannot end this report without saying thanks to Marion, who has slipped so easily into the role of housekeeper, keeping us all up to speed with washing tea towels and noticing what we need when we need it. Also to Iain who fills the urn and sets up plates, cutlery, water carafes etc and generally keeps things moving in the kitchen. Also thanks to all the people who have pitched in on the day, and last but not least, the faithful washers up, Will, Sue, Sarah, Katalina and all the many others who leave the kitchen spotless every week after washing up for between 80/100 people.

Women's Club

The Women's Club has had another busy year and continues to be a focal point for the many women who come together every Thursday.

On average forty to fifty women (and children), from a wide range of countries attend. There are frequently new faces as well as the familiar ones. The Club provides an opportunity to meet up, talk, laugh, share experiences, and perhaps help solve some everyday problems.

A hot meal is provided at the start of the afternoon, with the support of the teams of volunteers who prepare and cook them for us.

Over the year a range of diverse activities have taken place, including; art and craft sessions, preserving, henna and hairdressing. There have been trips out to the surrounding areas and into the Dales. We have been involved in community initiatives to visit and meet other groups within the District. Parties were held to celebrate festivals and key dates in different religious calendars.

Toys and activities are provided for the children to play together and with their mothers. During the summer, weather permitting, the Club relocates to meet in Lister park, for picnics and play.

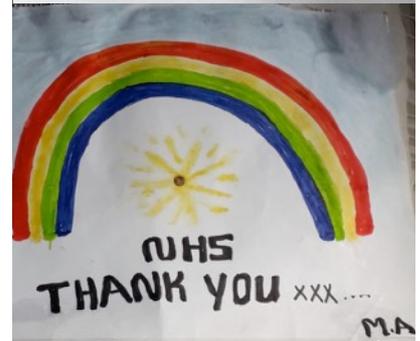
Food parcels are made up to be taken away (a welcome top up to weekly provisions). The Storehouse at Innchurches has continued to support us to make this possible.

Advice and support is also available, from providing information about other organisations and services to help women navigate systems and institutions.

A big thank you to all of the women, and those who give their time to support the club and its activities, who make the Women's Club the supportive community that it is.

Following the spread of Covid-19 and the abrupt lockdown situation, the Women's Club has continued in a different form. We now have an active WhatsApp group (a way of keeping each other in touch and providing information), a deliveries group (food parcels, books, children's toys etc), a gardening group, and a sewing group (making scrub bags for NHS workers). All examples of how the Club has adapted to the change from the physical coming together at Hallfield Road, to the provision of on-line support and home delivered services.

How the Club has responded to this situation, is a great example of the resourcefulness and commitment of the women to provide support to each other.



Beautiful gifts for Bradford hospitals made by Mehret

A small selection of Womens Club regulars at Good Shepherd's Centre, Keighley



Fitness at Kalsa Gym



I am writing this at the last minute and after the decision to suspend the gym group because of the Coronavirus situation.

This comes at the end of a year that has seen numbers grow, with sometimes 15 people training in one session and the most lovely atmosphere you can imagine.

People really appreciate the difference the exercise makes to their physical health and sense of wellbeing especially when times are hard: while waiting for Home Office decisions, or when jobs have dried up and people are back facing hardship – notwithstanding the dreams of a happy life after being successful in asylum applications.

We are trying to see whether we can continue doing some sort of exercise group with the help of social media and I really really hope we will manage to replicate the lovely sense of community and light support that stems out of being together at the gym each week.

Paola

The Storage

This year has again seen an increased number of people from refugee communities -and allies of- offering their help.

But this year has also offered us new challenges which as usual we try to face with alternate successes and failures.

I think it was towards November 2019 that people started coming in asking for coats, clothes, shoes and telling us that they were staying in hotels. The presence and numbers of people looking for support while in the hotel has meant us needing to change our priorities; we asked for support from all the people that have been donating over time. As usual people have been fantastic: we started receiving winter coats and shoes, toys for children. No sooner things were put out than they found their way into a new home.

Now we, like all, face a new challenge with the covid-19. We are in the midst of trying to find ways to keep supporting people's needs while at the same time keeping the storage closed as a group happening.

During the year we have lost the free transport support for furniture. This will keep being a challenge as transport costs for the storage have increased; we keep trying to do as much as possible ourselves but bad backs have not been helping over the past few months.

We keep looking for someone with a van that would not mind offering once a month support with their transport.

We are also still looking for someone that would be able and willing to do small repairs jobs at the storage or in people's houses. Sometimes things get wasted when a small intervention could save them.

Paola

Maria, our very friendly police person

As well as giving formal talks to English class, Maria our designated police person was a weekly presence at evening drop-in. Here she quietly chatted over supper for up to 80 people or more. She also joins in monthly Big Meeting which everyone attends for information on relevant forthcoming events or asylum issues.

When she comes to talk to students in the English lessons she is faced with up to 30 people from a myriad of different countries, e.g. Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan (lots!), DRC Congo, Chad and "Kurdistan" (Kurdish people from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey). Because we have a very fluid clientele she will have been speaking to many new people each time. To her credit Maria is not fazed by this variety of people and nationalities; in fact I think she relishes it, as we all do at BIASAN. The topics she has spoken about have included: Hate Crime, Personal Safety and Self-defence, Different Types of Crime, How to Contact the Police, Bonfire Night, Police Uniform and Equipment,

the Laws and Bye-Laws on Litter, e.g. fines for dropping cigarette ends in the street. Her most recent talk was on Modern Day Slavery and the problems in City Park between some young African asylum seekers and local youths. On one occasion she brought a Police Inspector to meet us.

Some people understand much of what she says but most have very little English and some none at all. However, there are always questions and discussion following her talks and with her presence and manner she communicates to everyone a sense that she represents a police force that is friendly, approachable and deeply concerned for their safety and well-being in Bradford. I was pleased to hear at the end of the session last week that everyone felt safe in Bradford.

When asked, our members prefer police in Bradford to those in their own countries.

Richard

Three members write

Three very different stories from three of our members:

Ahlam finds a new family



My name is Ahlam Dukhkhani. I come from Iraq. I have been living in the UK since 2015. As well I have been working as a volunteer in BIASAN since 2015.

I lost my family in my country because of the war. My daughter was killed in front of my eyes. I was in such a hard situation.

But now I have got to know my new family in BIASAN Womens Group. It's a big family. I feel happy there. Because I have found care and affection. I speak English and I have good friends and I have knowledge.

Now this is my country which I love.

Greetings from Ahlam

Osman's Bike Story

One Thursday I went to BIASAN. I had an English lesson. I left my bike outside the building. I went to the class. While I was studying one of the volunteers, Mo, came into the class and asked, "who has a bike outside?" I said, "I have." She said, "someone stole your bike." I didn't ask our teacher to excuse me. I just ran downstairs and out of the building. I was going crazy. Oh no, it's gone! I took one road and followed it.

I couldn't see him. Suddenly he passed by me. I just shouted, "Hoy! Stop! It's my bike." When he heard me he turned back and looked at me. Then he rode away very fast. I ran fast but I got too tired to catch him. He tried to change gear but something wrong happened on the bike and it stopped. He left it and ran away.

I picked up the bike and brought it back. I checked the bike. I found a problem with the chain and gears. I was very anxious but at the same time very happy because I had got my bike back. After a week I took the bike to the cycle shop to repair it. The team in the shop told me that everything is free because you are an asylum seeker. They changed the brakes, two tyres, the chain, gears and reflector. I asked them to give me a lock but they didn't have one. Thank you, cycle shop, for the free service.

Now I have a lock and I always use it!

Osman

Trip to Scarborough by Ibrahim

On the 11th August we went to Scarborough beach from Bradford. It was in the morning at 9.30 am. My friend and I went to BIASAN to catch the bus and we were very excited about the trip. When we got to BIASAN there were a lot of people there and also three buses. After a while we jumped into the bus and found our seats which were together. The bus started moving to Scarborough.

It's about three hours to Scarborough [more like two usually-Ed] but on the way there was much traffic. We were late and didn't get to Scarborough at the right time. But it was fine, so when we reached there Maggie told us about the time when we would be going back to Bradford. So we had just three and a half hours in Scarborough. I and my friend started walking to the beach and looking at the beautiful beach and the fairground. There were a lot of people on the beach, some of them playing and some of them swimming. By the sea there was one woman who had two dogs. I liked her dogs and I asked her, "How old are they?"

She answered "July is two years old and June is 13 months." I said, "Nice dogs." She said, "Thank you, love." I said, "Bye bye."

The next things which we saw seemed strange. We saw donkeys for riding and people riding them. In Sudan donkeys are homeless and some people too.

The trip was very fantastic. I really loved it and my friend also loved it. I hope I have a chance to go on another trip to learn new things in my life. I loved it. Thanks very much, BIASAN. It was a great day and fun!

Ibrahim

Mr Richard, my teacher, said, "Super, Ibrahim. I loved reading about your VERY FANTASTIC day.

[Apologies to Ibrahim - this was accidentally omitted from last year's newsletter. In 2019 we went to Filey, site of all the seaside photos in this newsletter - Ed]



Osman says hello

2019 - what a successful year for English class!

Faith, Richard and Ahmed write

We have welcomed students to our lessons from countries as far away as Vietnam and Thailand, from the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), Sudan, Eritrea and Yemen, as well as Kurds from Iraq and Iran. We hope you all enjoyed your lessons with us and thank you all for enriching our understanding of your home and customs.

During the past twelve months we have benefitted from and enjoyed the input from our partnership with Opera North. They performed workshops for us at BIASAN, giving a taste of operas they were staging in Leeds. In one workshop, "Lullabies", they encouraged students to offer music and singing from other countries. One song was so successful that they recorded it and then came back to film it before placing it on YouTube.

We were also given tickets to three different operas, Katya Kabanova, Aida and la Bohème, which were an eye-opener for those students not familiar with theatre or opera. We thank Opera North for the opportunities they gave our students to have a taste of the artistic world. We hope this partnership will continue.

Richard is now in his 20th year of teaching English at BIASAN. He loves the teaching and the students as much as ever. The number of students and their needs are also as great as ever, so he is delighted to be working alongside co-volunteers Faith and Denise on Wednesdays and Thursdays 4pm – 6pm throughout the year (except during the Christmas week).

Their added skills and expertise, allied to an infectious sense of humour and warm welcome to whoever turns up, help to create a very special atmosphere of fun, friendship and learning in the lessons. On Thursdays when the numbers are higher we are glad to have the extra volunteer help of Robert, Ahmed and often Fumi from Japan, an MA student in Bradford University Peace Studies Dept. Fumi was also elected "BIASAN President of the World" when we held a Mock Election in December 2019 at the time of the UK General Election.

The conversational English classes are an important resource for refugees and asylum seekers to learn English. The classes are targeted towards all levels. This is good as the more advanced students help in the session, though a drawback of a mixed level conversational English class is that some more advanced learners stop coming as the English classes are too easy for them. The classes are more suited for beginners to the English language. The classes are a great benefit to the students and are quite popular as the numbers have been going up. There are enough volunteers which is a good thing as each volunteer takes their own group, this makes the classes more manageable if we have many students. The classes are fun and enjoyable, the students like the musical aspect of the session at the end, this is an excellent way to learn English and it brings everyone together. The classes are a safe space for students to interact with each other and build confidence in learning and speaking the English language. There are some students who are alone in this country, the English class allows them to build friendship groups and be part of a community, a family.



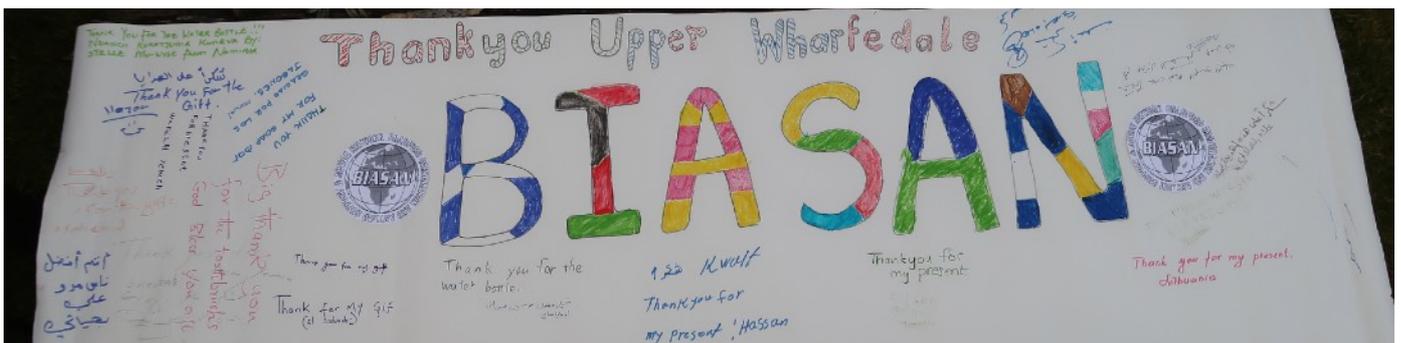
Generous Wharfedale

Thanks to the creative energy of Mo Rahman we have growing links with the community of thoughtful and generous people in Upper Wharfedale in the Yorkshire Dales, both the people living in the villages in the valley and the children who go to the secondary school near Grassington. They live in a different world to the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in Bradford and other cities in Yorkshire but they really do care for them, especially at BIASAN.

The Upper Wharfedale School in Threshfield has a well-deserved “School of Sanctuary” recognition for its care and support for people in need in both the community around it and also the wider world. It has an Equality Committee of senior pupils and staff which sends beautifully wrapped and labelled toys, games and clothes as Christmas presents for the children and families who come to BIASAN’s Women’s Group on Thursday afternoons. At their Christmas parties in 2018 and 2019, gift-giving Santa made a dramatic appearance from Africa, from Sudan one year and Kenya the next. Some of the gifts also found their way to the English lessons where there have been parents with young children amongst the up to 30 or more people from Africa, the Middle East, Asia and recently

Central America. The question has been to find a way to express thanks and appreciation of the gifts and the very touching gesture of the whole school thinking and caring for asylum seekers from so far afield. In one BIASAN English lesson, students worked together on a 220cm length of lining wallpaper to talk and colour in the BIASAN lettering and write thank you in English and their own language, then their names and the countries they came from. Co-volunteer English teacher Richard, who lives in Littondale, only five miles from the school, took the “Thank You” banner there, showing it to the Equality Committee and two separate classes which asked him good and searching questions on asylum and refugees. It was very appropriate that these lessons were scheduled to be on “Human Rights”. The banner is now up on a wall in the school.

A similar banner was also created by an English class to thank the good people in the Upper Wharfedale Refugee Support Group for their donation of toiletries and small domestic items to the adult students. That will also be displayed on a wall in the Buckden Institute, the community centre for people in the villages nearby.



Mock elections in English class



In the week before the UK General Election on December 12th 2019 BIASAN held its own World Presidential Election. Organized in the English class and held on Thursday December 5th three brave candidates vied to become the BIASAN World President with a programme of policies “to make the world a better place”. The aim was to give everyone in the building that evening the experience as close as possible to the process of voting in a UK election, i.e.

- Candidates creating their policies and rehearsing a speech to be given at a “hustings”
- Creation of election posters and notices, candidate flyers and a big billboard banner
- A “hustings” at 4.30pm in the common room downstairs when each candidate, bedecked with a dazzling rosette, explained their policies and answered questions from the floor
- Everyone in the building was cajoled into going upstairs to the Polling Station, i.e. the English classroom, to register with the clerks, to receive a voting slip/ballot paper, to go into one of the two screened polling booths, to mark their ballot paper in secret and finally to fold it and put into the secure Ballot Box.
- A team of vote counters under the supervision of a Counting Officer counted the votes for each candidate until the Counting Officer could give the result to the BIASAN Constituency Presiding Officer who formally declared the result to a large crowd of excited people in the classroom.

The three candidates were:

Fumi from Japan – red rosette – policies: Refugees welcome, No Armies, No Wars, “Join in the dream that the world will be as one”

Julius from Uganda – green rosette – policies: Climate Crisis (stop pollution and global warming), Diversity (all kinds of communities living and working together), Equality and Freedom (for people of all faiths, all backgrounds and all people who are gay, bisexual or trans)

Nazar from Sudan- blue rosette – policies: Treat people the way you want to be treated yourself, water/hydrogen powered cars, planes and trains, £1 HIV and Cancer Cure Campaign.

Fumi - red rosette – was duly elected BIASAN WORLD PRESIDENT 2019/2020

Thank you everyone who took part in this event, especially the three candidates!



Thomas makes a speech. He is also a great singer, recorded by Opera North and put on YouTube

Our busiest day ever?

9 January 2020

I was worried that we were doing too much on the one day (unavoidable for various complex reasons) but everybody got stuck in and it went really well. At lunchtime we had the 'reverse Advent parcels' delivered from Ilkley. All the men who had volunteered to carry them in (and more) turned up to help. They formed a chain (organised by a guy from Iran who told me he used to be a manager) and got them into the billiard room from the back door double quick.

Christine, Sandra and Zara then set up a system, with help from the women from Ilkley - everything was sorted into very big supermarket bags and given to the women who were attending the women's Thursday club by this point. Men and women who came later were invited to help themselves in the early evening.

In the meantime, the same men helped Helen and Mo to set up the upstairs room for Helen's print session. Mo had invited people from Laisterdyke Community Centre to share the event through the Stronger Communities integration project. The event was observed by Zara from Bradford Council Stronger Communities and Ben Greener, a high-ranking civil servant from Housing, Communities and Local Government. (Ben turned out to be a fellow Geordie who recognised my accent, so that helped). They were very impressed with the printing session and the amazing activity that was happening.

Akhilam and Anju then made tea & food for the Ilkley women, and generally entertained them.

The amazing thing is that all the normal activities carried on in the midst of this - Women's Club, plus their usual helpful advice, food, etc

Drop-In with Mark cooking and Marion, Iain & others helping in the kitchen

The English Class with a vast number of students

Kate and Rami preparing for their outreach work

Barry giving advice in the billiard room while people rummage through boxes of food.

Maggie



People carried on eating while all this was going on!



Anju helped serve tea

Thursday drop-in guests

These are some of the guests who have come to give information to members at Big Meeting, which we have on the first Thursday of every month:

Naheed Hussain, English Language Service Co-ordinator from Stronger Communities Together

Kate Butler, Hate Crime Alliance women and Family Worker

Wahid Rashid, Bradford Council Refugee Engagement Co-ordinator

Zara from Stronger Communities, Bradford Council

Ben Greener, department of Housing, Communities and Local Government

(see article on our busiest day)

Laisterdyke Community centre

Mohammed Hanif, Royal Voluntary Service helping members find opportunities around Bradford

Mohin, Neighbourhood Warden Services, Manningham, how to make sure you do the right thing re litter, rubbish disposal etc

Fine cultural events:

In September Opera North hosted two workshops about Greek tragedies

Columbian Music Night in February, a wonderful concert of Columbian music by BIASAN volunteer Fumi's friend Gaby and her guitarist husband Adrian

(photos on this page)



Cycling Scheme

During one of my classes someone asked me if I could get them a bike, and this led me to go into the MCF BIKERY in Shipley, to ask if there was any possibility of bikes for asylum seekers. I was a bit slow on the uptake, as Paola had already mentioned this at one of our big meetings, and had already been in touch with them. As I was working and as a lot of these are mostly young men, I agreed with Paola that I would take over the bike list and would do what I could to get bikes for those who wanted them. The list grew very long indeed. We started by taking three people at a time to the MCF Bikery, and there they got kitted out with not only a bike but also helmet, padlock, pump, lights, high vis jacket and bell. Concerned that the list was getting ever longer and we were only doing three at a time, I put out a post on Facebook and got an amazing response. Several people donated bicycles from as far away as Skipton. We were offered a lot of bikes from Ontrak, a company who refurbish all the bikes taken to the Bradford Council tips, and we also had a wonderful offer of financial donation to pay for everyone who wanted a bike to have one. This would have amounted to thousands of pounds, and as we were being given the bikes free of charge, I asked if we could instead use this money to pay for all the equipment that was being provided to each person, at a cost of £35 each. The MCF Bikery have been absolutely wonderful in facilitating the bike giveaways, (all donated bikes are sent to Hull Prison for refurbishment by prisoners and the bikes from Ontrak are used as a learning experience for young adults excluded from school, so a win win in every direction.) When we were offered so many bikes we decided to do multiple bike giveaways at Bradford Deaf Centre, approximately 20 at a time. We have now done four multiple bike giveaways! Thanks so much to everyone involved, it has made a huge difference to the lives of so many people, some of whom have been placed so far out of Bradford that they have to walk for over an hour to get into the centre of town. Having a bicycle makes a huge difference. Special thanks to Helen, John and Scott from MCF, Adrian at Ontrak, Maggie, Clare, Nina and Fiona, for all their volunteering, and Christine at Deaf Centre for much kindness and cups of tea.

Helen



BIASAN supports Lift the Ban!

The campaign is working

We reported on the Lift the Ban campaign in last year's newsletter. The case has been made to millions of people, including senior politicians. Allowing asylum seekers to work makes sense not just for them but for all of us. People who work pay taxes and the state does not need to support them while their cases are being decided.

More than 90,000 people have signed the petition

We have powerful campaign partners such as the TUC, Ben & Jerry's, Crisis, the Salvation Army and Amnesty International

The campaign has been featured in The Guardian, The Times, The Telegraph, The Financial Times, BBC Radio 4.

There is now cross-party support for lifting the ban and ministers have promised to review the Government's policy on the right to work.

BIASAN supports this campaign and several of our members have worked hard for it, including Joan:

I am worried about my future, I have been in this country for 16 years but my Home Office issues are still at a stand still. I joined BIASAN women's group in 2012 and appreciate the good work they do – I recommend it to other people to join if they wish to.

BIASAN has helped me and my family with advice on immigration application, food, and weekly gathering which draws so many people to attend.

Food is served every week. It's quite an interesting group, people from so many different backgrounds meet and enjoy sharing their experiences. We do also have occasional country or lake side trips. We meet other different groups to share and know each other. It's the same group, BIASAN and women's group that has given me guidance to an opportunity to join groups of my interest.



A clear message - Joan with fellow campaigner

Right to Work is one of those groups where we started with some training in campaigning and now we campaign in solidarity with other groups like Lift the Ban.

The Right to Work campaign challenges the government policy, which is that asylum seekers need to wait for 12 months before they are allowed to work, if a decision has not yet been made by the Home Office. And that's only in a very small group of jobs called 'shortage occupations.' We have been campaigning tirelessly to change this law so that asylum seekers are allowed to work if they have been in the system for more than six months without getting their decision from the Home Office, and to change or stop the shortage occupation list. Right to Work has been campaigning by organising meetings whereby we could meet councillors and MP's, collecting signatures to send to the Home Secretary. Postcards were also designed and sent to the Home Secretary.

For me, even if I have been in this country for so many years, my leave to remain hasn't been granted yet. Campaigning for the Right to Work would be the way forward to get my problem heard and hopefully sorted out. It's given an opportunity to asylum seekers to have a say on things we have been bothered with. We are a community affected with mental health issues, depression and guilty conscience that we claim for benefits which we did not work for. We would like to defy this public opinion worry and obstacles that divide us, discriminate and put us aside. Because of language barriers as we do not totally mix with the society to learn. We are campaigning for asylum seekers to provide for themselves and also to contribute to the society through tax revenue collection.

USEFUL CONTACTS FOR MEMBERS AND HELPERS

British Red Cross

Sam Baka SBaka@redcross.org.uk 07872 007819

McKenzie Friends

Support for asylum seekers without solicitors
mckenziefriends@beaconbradford.org
0330 113 7644 or 07531 576330

Manuel Bravo

Qualified free legal advice for asylum seekers
office@manuelbravo.org.uk 0113 350 8608

Bevan House Primary Care Centre

Medical help for asylum seekers and refugees
enquiries@bevanhealthcare.co.uk 01274 322400

Bradford Refugee Action

Wide range of refugee and asylum seeker help
www.refugee-action-uk.org/refugee-action-bradford
01274 924982

Solidaritech

Reconditioned computers for asylum seekers
hello@solidaritech.com 01274 288910

BIASAN virtual English classes

General info: Richard strand@hawkswick.net
To join a class: Robert biasanenglish1@gmail.com
07591 379436

BIASAN legal advice

Please contact Barry, our legal adviser, via our new email:
bradfordbiasan@gmail.com

Accounts

Biasan Accounts	Year	Year
	1 March 19 to 31 March 2020	1 March 18 to 31 March 2019
Regular Donations	3867	3612
Seedbed		10000
Magic Grant		500
Aviva		300
VG Alliance	1500	
Bradford Met HLP	2690	
Youth Service	1970	
Roger Stott Charity	1420	
Stronger Communities	4990	
Heathly Life Styles	1345	
Sovereign Health	1000	
Other Donations	10007	5602
Total Income	28789	20014
Food	4105	3158
Newsletter	429	466
Insurance	448	403
Examination of Accounts	168	167
Admin	98	96
Womens Group	2136	4707
Activities/ Support	19183	9589
Room Hire	3213	4054
Total Expenses	29780	22640
Balance	-991	-2626
c/f	18055	20681
New Balance	17064	18055
Bank	16879	18010
Cash	185	45
Total	17064	18055

Jackie Coutts {treasurer} Jackiecoutts2004@yahoo.co.uk

Co-op Bank Biasan Support Fund sort no 08 92 99 a/c 65698716

OUR GRATITUDE TO:

Baidon Church
 Bangladeshi Youth Organisation
 Bradford Foundation Trust for extensive Covid support
 Bradford Friendship Choir
 Bradford Literature Festival
 Bradford MDC Healthy Living 2
 Bradford MD Council HLP1
 Bradford MDC NRPF team
 Bradford Youth Service
 Christine at Bradford Deaf Centre
 City of Sanctuary
 Adam Cole
 Julie Cowdrey
 Dr Eisner
 Holy Family
 Gillington Council of Churches
 Healthy Life Styles
 MCF Bikery and Ontrak
 Muslim Womens Council for Covid support to members
 Open Ifhtar
 Opera North
 Parceval Hall
 Parkside Centre
 Peacemakers International
 People in the Dales – Judy Rogers
 Rockwell Centre
 Roger Stott Charity
 Scargill House
 Shipley Woodcraft Folk
 Simon Stewart
 Sovereign Health
 Stronger Communities
 Suma
 University of Edinburgh Award
 Upper Wharfedale Refugee Support Group
 Upper Wharfedale School
 VGS Alliance
 All BIASAN volunteers
 West Yorkshire Near Neighbours – Kaneez Khan
 Alan Wetherill and Baska Swiderska
 Wharfedale Refugee Response
 Wibsey Community Garden
 York Group
 Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust
 Regular subscribers, donors and many, many more

BIASAN's accounts are examined by West Yorkshire Accounting Service

You can also give via Local Giving Biasan Bradford - where any tax paid can be collected.

Open Iftar: Ramadan Tent Project

Biasan were delighted to be invited to be part of the Open Iftar 2019, Bradford Centenary Square.

We were part of a giant community of like minded souls who came together and helped in whichever way we could. We were also very delighted to meet Omar Salha the founder of the Ramadan Tent project and worked closely with the Bradford lead Kamran Rashid and his team.

The Open Iftar was designed to bring different communities together, Muslims and non Muslims, where people had a chance to talk, meet, eat and connect together. It was a very humbling experience and I learned a lot, as I am sure all of us did. But the spirit and the faith was the spark that led to a fabulous three-day event. We made long lasting friendships and also built bridges with hard to reach communities, inspiring connections. All in all it was an amazing, enriching experience which touched many hearts, minds and souls.

Mo

Mo represents BIASAN in Palestine

Mo wrote an essay on gratitude using her work at BIASAN as an example. She came first in a national competition and won £500 from the Issachar Trust. She used this to go on a fact-finding mission to Palestine with the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust, endorsed by BIASAN as agreed at Big Meeting:

There were 12 ladies, Christian and Muslim. Our aim was to visit the holy shrines of both religions. We also visited the camps and most of the occupied areas of Palestine, West Bank. We visited a lot of social hubs, communities in need supported by the Amos Trust. We visited quite a few women activist hubs.

I loved the camp, and would have liked to have volunteered for at least half a day but we had a strict programme.

We did visit the Dead Sea, it was a beautiful place to be. For me, seeing the tensions, hostility and disparities between communities was nothing new, having been working with destitute people from many countries for over 15 years now.

I couldn't see the difference in the injustice that happens in Palestine, to the injustice happening in other countries including the UK.

It was an amazing experience, and I would like to go back one day, to volunteer on worthwhile projects. *Mo*

photograph copyright Jannat Iqbal



