



Lockdown Report

a summary of the services and activities we provided from
23rd March to 31st July



*A huge thank you from
our Centre Leader, Sara Robinson*

We so miss our busy, vibrant Centre being full of people, sharing, eating and supporting one another. But Covid-19 chivvied us into digitalising our casework, which means we have a much clearer, statistical understanding of who we support. And though nothing beats face to face, we have quicker ways of rapidly communicating with our community through mass texting and new social media platforms.

We've been able to access the generosity of our supporters and new forms of funding, and we've learnt to innovate quickly around food, housing provision, and online English Language support. We've developed new partnerships locally which we know will only grow in the coming months and years. And inevitably, we've introduced a part-time working from home policy and a raft of new Covid compliant health and safety processes.

Our staff, Trustees and broader volunteers have knocked our socks off. Whether shielding, working or volunteering from home or in the Centre, they've each given over and above to help our community through this time. We know it's far from over and as we strap in for the rocky Autumnal and Winter months ahead, we know we can lean on one another to get us through. **We are one. We are community.**

A special shout out for our incredible volunteers, many of whom are our Centre Users; the ones who have been with us for a long time, and also the new ones who came to offer their help. We have had individuals offering out their empty homes for those homeless or isolating, people who have transported and fitted washing machines, make masks, carried out deliveries, sorted clothes, made welfare calls, raised funds, packed parcels, or have just got in touch to see what we need!

In 2020 We are Supporting 648 people*

*as of May 2020



Who speak **54** different languages



This includes

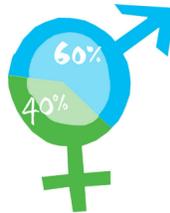
180
individuals



&



120 Families
with children



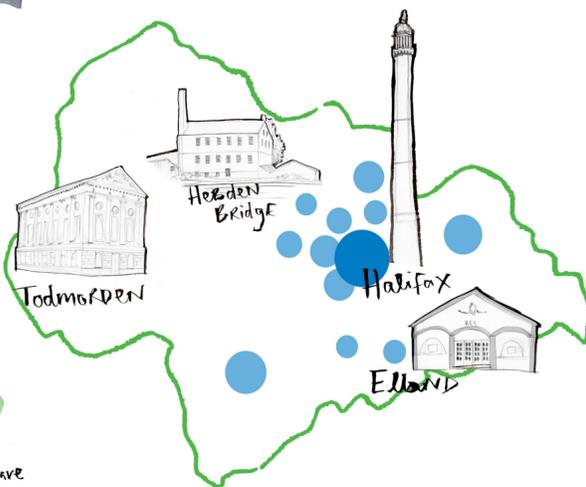
They live in



188
Households



A small number number have
No fixed Abode.



Creating a safe and welcoming place for our community is at the heart of what we do. For many of our service users, the Centre is not just a place to access support, but it is also their home. The lockdown and Government restrictions have meant that we were unable to open the doors to our community, however staff and volunteers have worked hard over the past few months to ensure that service users can continue to access the help that they need. The team were required to respond to need quickly, in new and innovative ways: we digitised our casework, adapted current services, and instigated new ones such as housing management, Wi-Fi provision and doorstep deliveries.

We were thankfully able to maintain a volunteer team to support staff during this time. Despite many of our volunteers having to shield at home, a team of **83 volunteers provided nearly 3000 hours of voluntary work!**

During the lockdown we commissioned this piece of work by artist Ruth Dyer. It is one of three that beautifully demonstrates the people we were working with as of May 2020.



Food

In usual times we provide a Community Lunch 4 days a week, serving over 1000 meals a month based on dishes from Syria, Nigeria and beyond. Lockdown meant we had to adapt to a takeaway service on just two days a week.



Over these four months, 9 volunteers week provided 2057 hot take away meals from our Welcome Café. These meals are so important for tackling food poverty and isolation, one user saying... *'For me it's an important social centre especially during this time of crisis with the Coronavirus. I'm currently unemployed so having somewhere to come like this is helpful as it helps me feel part of the community. I love the food and the atmosphere in the queue, especially the fact that it brings people from so many countries.'*



We made sure to keep everyone safe by having a rota of staff monitoring the queue for social distancing, also providing face masks and hand sanitiser.



In a new partnership with Halifax Opportunities Trust (HOTS) and Himmat, we developed a food parcel delivery service. 1644 parcels were delivered to residents in Park Ward (and some further afield). This service was primarily run by HOTS and created in immediate response to the pandemic to support those shielding, and from June onwards provision was reduced to a stricter referral and collection system.



In June, we also delivered 40 Ramadam food packs in partnership with the Community Cooking Group.



Communication with Centre Users

We were immediately concerned about the isolation that many of our Centre Users were at risk of experiencing during lockdown. Many do not speak English and visit us daily for support, food and a home from home. With asylum support being only £37.75 a week, they do not have the resources to access activities that would help curb the boredom of lockdown or remotely connect with other people.

We quickly created and trained a group of 23 volunteers, who made 337 welfare calls to 200 individuals and families; checking that they were ok, providing deliveries of food and activities and keeping them up-to-date with latest Coronavirus news. As restrictions were eased and many of our volunteers returned to work this reduced, so by late July, 16 volunteers continued to make around 40 calls a week. To complement this, we were able to open a safe, Portacabin reception outside the Centre and implement a triage system so that Centre Users could directly access support if needed.

One of our volunteers told us...*'As a volunteer, I'm proud to play a small part in making the Centre response to COVID 19 as effective as possible. It's not just Centre Users who benefit from their continuing work. For someone who has underlying health issues which limits the type of contribution I can make at the moment, keeping telephone contact with isolated single parents and others is extremely important to me; it makes me feel that I am doing something worthwhile and useful. Without the huge efforts of staff to put the support framework in place, I wouldn't be able to make that contribution. Thanks St Augustine's!'*

We also started using Textlocal as way of quickly and efficiently communicate weekly important information to our all our Centre Users. Throughout these 4 months we sent a massive 5052 texts to 314 contacts.

Before the lockdown we provided 3 weekly advice and support drop-ins, regular appointments, Job Search support and Immigration advice appointments. Due to Government restrictions and a number of our staff having to shield at home, we had to adjust and digitalise our services so that we could continue supporting people remotely.

Between April and the end of July, our support staff undertook 1070 pieces of direct, phone based casework with Centre Users. These covered health, housing, debt, education, benefits, new arrivals to the area, and destitution, but also fears and confusion about Covid-19, changes in wider service provision and food poverty.

We have two Level 2 OISC regulated Immigration Advisers who continued to provide Immigration support to individuals with ongoing cases. Due to the Home Office and Tribunals pausing all work – including substantive interviews – we were supporting smaller numbers of people with immigration work at the beginning of the lockdown. However, as restrictions were eased and the Home Office reopened, Immigration casework has increased considerably and we are now looking to expand this service.

Casework





Many of our Centre Users approached us with the need for activities at home. Thanks to Arts Drop UK we were provided with a total of 400 early years, primary and secondary brand new art packs, that we were able to deliver along with 234 activity and resource packs. These included included books, games, toys, clothes and PPE (face masks and hand sanitiser) that had been requested by Centre Users. To date we have given out 1400 face masks; 500 reusable, 900 disposable. We are incredibly grateful to all those who responded to our call for donations of items for the packs.



One recipient said: *"This is the first time I receive an activity pack for my daughter and K was over the moon, she was really excited, this is a heart-warming gift."* *"Thank you St Augustine and thank you Jihen because you always care about us."*



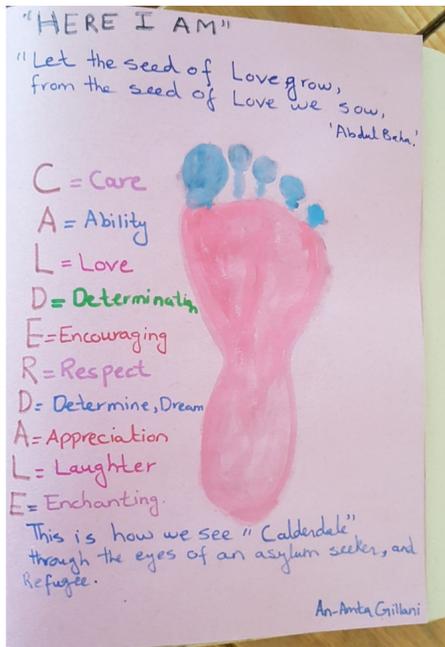
In June restrictions were eased slightly to allow for smaller groups to come together to do socially distanced activities. Our gardening volunteer Steve had continued to come to the Centre throughout the lockdown to mow the lawn, however in the latter half of the lockdown we were able to welcome small groups of volunteers back to join the gardening group. We are especially grateful to two people seeking asylum, D and A, who came to us and asked if they could build a bench to replace one that had been vandalised. D said:



"I have been a carpenter for thirty years but I haven't been able to make anything for over a year. Last week I made a wooden seat around a tree at St Augustines that had been vandalised. To work again feels like freedom. I come alive again. It a beautiful feeling in my heart to find something I love. When I touch the materials and wood, and start shaping and cutting it, with my friend A, I enjoyed it so much. I don't see the weather or the time just my mind is in my work."

This is something that we are building on, and we set up an ongoing small DIY club in August for our Centre Users to harness the skills that they do not often have the opportunity to use.

During Refugee Week we helped develop the digital 'Here I Am project' with Artworks and Northern Broadsides, to celebrate the communities of Calderdale. Over 400 people from across Calderdale, many of whom were our Centre Users, submitted a piece of art work which was released online together as a video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYagig1fS9E>



We also produced and released our own video for Refugee Week, featuring some of our Centre Users: <https://vimeo.com/429422879/d7a7b076f5>, and we invited Robin Tuddenham (CEO of Calderdale Council) to the Centre to be part of a socially distanced picture of the Refugee Week logo, and to celebrate being a Valley of Sanctuary! A short film from that day can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1130592263992120>



One for a future report, but striking a balance between safety and isolation, throughout August we introduced a Summer Programme of online and small, socially distanced group activities. With the backing of the Council's Public Health Department we hosted children's and adult's arts groups provided by The Artworks, a free clothes shop, as well as gardening, walking and DIY groups. We hosted an online Language Day and an incredible 'Racism in Calderdale' discussion featuring speakers from our Centre and local group, Light Up Black and African Culture, which by September had been watched 1800 times: <https://www.facebook.com/StAugustinesCentreHalifax/videos/650981262476783>

English Language Classes

We usually provide 9 English classes a week, varying from beginners to more advanced classes, including an 'English for Life in the UK' podcast. These are vitally important for our Centre Users, allowing them to develop skills and meet people.



With the lockdown, our English Language volunteers had to get creative without face to face interaction. Using 1 to 1 phone calls, Whatsapp, email and zoom, we continued to teach English. We started with 7 volunteers working with 12 students, which by the end of July had increased to 22 volunteer tutors and 42 students. This shift was partly thanks to our digital inclusion project (see below), which by late August has again seen the number of people consistently accessing our English classes rise to over 70. Between April and July, our English Language volunteers clocked up 720 hours of voluntary teaching work!

Our 'English for Life in the UK' volunteer tutors have also created a podcast which can be found at: <https://anchor.fm/staugustinescentrehalifax>. During April and May, 10 podcasts were created with approximately 1,200 individual listens, and an established audience of 113 people. In June and July this rose to 1860 listens, with an audience of 230 listeners. The podcast has an increasingly global reach; 75% of listeners in April/May were based in in the UK, and by July 52% were.

Digital Inclusion

It quickly became clear that due to digital poverty, most of our Centre Users were unable to access school work, information, support and English classes during lockdown.

Thanks to the Community Foundation for Calderdale, Thompson Reuters, the Tudor Trust and private donor Hetha Duffy, in June we were able to distribute 'dongles' with 3 months of unlimited prepaid internet into 60 homes. We are currently looking at funding to extend this pioneering project for another 6 months.

Recipients have valued being able to access online information and connect with their families back home, as well our Zoom English classes; 34 of the people receiving Wi-Fi are now attending Zoom English classes.

One person said: *"When you don't have internet you feel like you are nothing. [The Wi-Fi support] relieves me from finding £35 a month. I can use that to buy boxer shorts for my son and football boots for my daughter."*

She rated the Wi-Fi project 10/10, it allowing her to learn English again, socialise with others, save money for other essential items, and her children have been able to access Education aids and had a way of keeping entertained in an otherwise isolating and boring time.

Another recipient contacted us to say *"I got a good news! We have an internet now. Now we are able to learn online by visiting kids' school website. Kids are very excited and happy! Thank you very much to you all for your care and kind hearts! We love you."*

Housing

During the lockdown, under the Government's 'Everybody In' scheme, we needed to quickly to support a number of our destitute Centre Users to find secure accommodation with host families or by other means; This short film featured on ITV highlights one of our hosting stories:

<https://www.facebook.com/StAugustinesCentreHalifax/posts/3220476681348121>



Homeless hostels are not often culturally appropriate for the people we support so support from the local authority, and new partnerships with The Gathering Place and Green Pastures, we managed to find and (for the first time) manage a house for three of our Centre Users. This is an area of work we want to develop long term.

Kate Auker of The Gathering Place said 'Much of our initial agreement was based on trust; our priority being to get the men housed quickly. 10 weeks in, this has worked incredibly well. It is clear that we share similar aims and values as organisations and this has been evident in how smoothly we have worked together; it has felt like we are all part of the same team and family; surely the mark of a great partnership! We all look forward to exploring how we can work together in the future.'



We have also visited the Calderdale based hotel used by MEARS since April to house 22 people seeking asylum. Whilst they have a roof over their head, food and WiFi, they aren't entitled to any money, which means they can't buy toiletries, clothes, bus tickets etc. We've been providing art and activities, clothes, advice and remote volunteering opportunities. Working with Happy Days UK, we also managed to provide a second hand bike for a former professional cyclist from Iran.

Nursery

Our Nursery usually cares for around 18 preschool children. We shut in late March for the lockdown period. Staff worked from home and undertook on-line safeguarding and new Covid related training to prepare for re-opening. Our Nursery team kept in regular contact with parents through email, WhatsApp and phone calls, as well as making doorstep visits with activity packs, and welfare visits to ensure all children were safe and well. The Nursery team undertook 392 points of contact with the families throughout this period.

We implemented a risk assessment and ensured all soft furnishings were removed, a deep clean and the massive task of all equipment being put into boxes to ensure everything was used on a rota system with at least 72 hours in between usage. Our Nursery reopened briefly through June for a small number of children over one session a day. This was a useful trial to prepare us for a full reopening in September!

Support from donors and funders

We are so grateful for all of the support we received throughout lockdown. Enforcing a stricter hygiene policy to protect staff and volunteers and adjusting our services, created additional costs that were not factored for at the beginning of the year.

We ran an online appeal for financial donations as well as food, clothes and items for activity packs. We had a fantastic response and want to share our thanks to the 90 individuals and 20 organisations who provided support at this time including (drumroll...): The Piece Hall, Suma Wholefoods, Happy Days UK, Blue Sky Baker (for regular donations of bread!), Weighsted, Pennine Provisions (both for regular donations to the food parcel service), Get Stuffed in Todmorden, Fresh & Easy, Mishal, Halifax Academy, McDonalds Huddersfield, Square Chapel.

We would also like to say a HUGE thank you to our funders for this period:

Tudor Trust, The Community Foundation for Calderdale, Lloyds Foundation, NACCOM, Refugee Action, Migration Exchange, Thompson Reuters, National Lottery Fund, and the Council's Park Ward Forum who each provided us with emergency grants to respond to the pandemic.

Yorkshire Building Society and Food for Life Get Togethers for their support with our hot take away meals.

Tesco Groundwork and Khalsa Trust for supporting the food parcel delivery service with food costs.

A massive thank you from everyone at St. Augustine's Centre. You replenish us all.