

Newsletter



Western Trust health workers Victoria Page, Donna McNally and Cheryl McElhinney with our CEO Lilian Seenoi Barr at the Advancing Race Equality Awards. Donna and Cheryl were highly commended for their work in establishing a Mums and Babies Group within NWMF.

Hundreds gather to celebrate Advancing Race Equality Awards

THE Chief Executive of the North West Migrants Forum has praised those working to make Northern Ireland a “better, fairer and more inclusive” place to live.

Lilian Seenoi Barr was speaking in front of 250 people who gathered in The Ebrington Hotel for the North West Migrants Forum’s annual Advancing Race Equality Awards.

Now in their fourth year, the Advancing Race Equality Awards were established to celebrate the efforts of individuals and grassroots community groups working to tackle racism and break down barriers.

Mrs Barr, who is also Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District Council, said, “It feels almost surreal that just a few days ago we marked 13 years of the North West Migrants Forum – and today, the Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District is the very person who founded it all those years ago.

“What a journey it has been.”

Host for the event was activist, author, lecturer and politician Chantelle Lunt.

Ms Lunt said that with the rise of far-right protests and anti-migrant agendas, the Advancing Race Equality Awards were more important than ever.

“They shine a much-needed spotlight on those doing incredible work to celebrate diversity, challenge racism and champion race equality,” she added.

A full list of the winners and runners-up can be found on pages five and six.

At a glance...

Page 2: Why we’re backing strike action by immigration solicitors

Page 4: A brief round-up of our annual meeting held on Jan 21

Pages 5 and 6: All the style from the Advancing Race Equality Awards

Pages 7 and 8: Read about two of our members who have been making the headlines

Pages 9, 10 and 11: Meet the tutors - A Q&A with those giving their time to teach our members English

Page 12: All smiles at NWMF Iftar event

Forum backs industrial action by immigration solicitors

IN February our colleagues in the Immigration Practitioners Group began industrial action in a stand over legal aid rates which haven't increased since 1982.

We, as a charity, had to weigh up the toll this would have on our members against the impact being felt by immigration solicitors who have effectively been acting as pro bono lawyers for the last number of years.

Following discussions, we agreed that it was only right that we stand shoulder to shoulder with those who provide legal representation to our members. The current situation is completely unsustainable and will undoubtedly run the risk of us losing the too few immigration practitioners that we have here, putting the system at risk of total collapse.

Here at the North West Migrants Forum we have had 300 people in ten months seeking support with matters relating to legal representation. A huge part of our caseworker's day is spent attempting to access solicitors who have the capacity to support our clients. We are just one small organisation in the north west, this is just the tip of a very large iceberg.

We are asking the Department of Justice to reconsider the modest demands of the Immigration Practitioners Group. Failure to do so places vulnerable people at high risk of attempting to navigate a complex Home Office process without the required support, increasing the risks of claims being rejected unfairly, people falling into irregular immigration status and falling into destitution – all of which increases the risk of exploitation and will increase strain on the already over-stretched third sector.



Main given five month sentence for abusive messages directed at our CEO

ON February 14 Kevin Barry McIntyre of Miller Street in Derry was found guilty of two counts of abusing the communications network by writing online messages about our CEO and Mayor of Derry and Strabane Lilian Seenoi Barr. McIntyre was sentenced to five months imprisonment for the offences which he committed in May 2024. Jailing him at Derry Magistrates' Court, district judge Barney Speaking afterwards, our Chief Executive said: "I am deeply grateful for the unwavering support of my community, colleagues, and loved ones throughout this challenging time.



"This verdict is not just about justice for me, it is a victory for everyone who believes in standing up to hate, intimidation, and threats against public service.

"No one should face fear for simply stepping forward to serve their community.

"The sentencing sends a powerful and unambiguous message: those who use threats, harassment, or hate speech to silence others will face the full weight of the law.

"There is a clear line between free speech and criminal behaviour. If you cross it, there will be consequences."

The court was told a message posted by McIntyre was headed 'terrorist alert' and said our CEO would be removed from Derry "dead or alive".

"At a time when many feel hopeless, when too often, those in positions of power embolden division and hatred instead of fostering unity. This case stands as a reminder that we do not have to accept that as our reality."

You can read Mrs Barr's full statement here: <https://shorturl.at/Un8eG>

Migrants Forum opposed to scrapping of intimidation points

AS of next month (April), intimidation points for social housing applications will be done away with, a move we feel will have a hugely detrimental impact on those we assist.

Under current legislation the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) awards intimidation points to social housing applicants who are at serious risk and need immediate rehousing. People who face intimidation can get 200 points.

Many of those who receive the points have been intimidated from their homes by paramilitaries. But as of April, intimidation points will be removed, although those already awarded them will retain them.

The Communities Minister said his aim was to 'level the playing field for victims of violence'.

"It has long been a source of frustration to me, along with many others in the chamber, that the selection scheme treats victims of violence differently, based on the cause of that violence," he told the Assembly.

"Someone targeted because of their ethnic identity receives more points than someone targeted because of their gender.

"Regardless of causation, victims will be assessed using the same criteria within the housing selection scheme operated by the NIHE."

From our point of view (NWMF), we firstly take issue with Mr Lyons' choice of words. By stating that families targeted because of their ethnic identity receive more points than someone targeted because of their gender creates a false and unnecessary comparison between the two.

We do appreciate that there are issues with how intimidation points work in practice, including the fact that victims of domestic abuse are not entitled to them.

But we would argue that rather than 'level the playing field' by punishing all, a more suitable solution would be to extend eligibility to all victims of intimidation, including those impacted by domestic abuse.

You can read the full text of our statement here: [Intimidation points](#)



Picture this...A photographic treble of what has been happening at NWMF



Children in Crossfire founder Richard Moore (centre) with NWMF Media Officer Conor Sharkey (left) and Ala Alsygaly following the recording of an episode of Richard's podcast 'What About You'. You can listen to Ala's story here: [What About You - Ala's Story](#)



DUP MLA Gary Middleton who paid a visit to our offices in February, accompanied by our CEO and Mayor Lilian Seenoi Barr. Gary was on hand to help our Mothers and Babies Group celebrate its first birthday. The group has become a beacon of joy for us all at North West Migrants Forum, lighting up our Fridays like never before. Long may it last!



Tony Clarke and Andrew Mullan of the NI Housing Executive with whom we held a very wide ranging and useful meeting in February. The Housing Executive has always been a close ally of the North West Migrants Forum and we appreciate greatly the support they give us as an organisation and our members. We look forward to working with Tony and his team further through the Housing Community Network platform. Pictured: HE Good Relations Officer Andrew Mullan, HE Race Relations Officer Tony Clarke and Paul Sceeny and Conor Sharkey of NWMF.

'We are creating a lasting impact across the North West and beyond'

WE held our AGM on January 21 when our report for the financial year 2023/24 was published

WE were joined by our Chief Executive and Mayor of Derry and Strabane Lilian Seenoi Barr for our annual meeting, held in NWMF headquarters on January 21.

Chairing the meeting was our Interim Manager Paul Sceeny while our Chairperson, Marija Stuke, participated via Zoom due to ill-health.

Also among the speakers was auditor Laurie Duffy who outlined the Forum's financial position and its various incomings and outgoings during the 2023 and 2024 financial year.



Accountant Laurie Duffy speaking at our annual meeting on January 21.

In her address, Marija Stuke spoke of the progress our organisation has made and the changes it has gone through in recent times.

"It was a year packed with achievements that continue to underscore our collective commitment to fostering positive change.

"As Chairperson, I extend my gratitude to our dedicated team, partners and supporters. Together we are creating a positive and lasting impact on lives and communities across the North West and beyond."

Our CEO, Mrs Barr, talked those present through the various programmes, activities and campaigns we are engaged in while also outlining the various changes at board and staff level that have taken place.

She said, "It was another year of change, growth and impact for the North West Migrants Forum, as we reflect on more than a decade of supporting migrant and minoritised communities in Derry and beyond, as well as looking forward to how NWMF's activities might evolve in the coming years."

Mrs Barr added that none of the work the organisation she established in 2012 does would be possible without the dedication of the charity's workforce, volunteers, partners and supporters.

"I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of you and thank you for being part of the NWMF journey," she said.

You can read our annual report here: [NWMF annual report](#)

Bittersweet...Saying goodbye to good friends

"PEOPLE come and go like seasons, each one bringing its own unique beauty", isn't that how the old saying goes?

Here at the North West Migrants Forum individuals and families come to us everyday. We support them until they are in a position to stand on their own feet again. Often they will then leave us, trading Derry for other UK cities like Glasgow, London, Sheffield and Birmingham.

To ensure they are not forgotten, we have introduced a 'Forever Friends' board to our office, featuring photos of those who have come but who have since moved on.

To each of you we wish only good things.



Our former Community Liaison Officer Ei Mon Thant who, along with her husband Myo, moved to Belfast in February. And Rula Omar (centre between Eva and Gaëlle) who moved to Glasgow with her husband Swar and their two children in January.

An evening of solidarity and style - A photographic look at the 2024 Advancing Race Equality Awards



All the #areawards24 winners and runners-up...

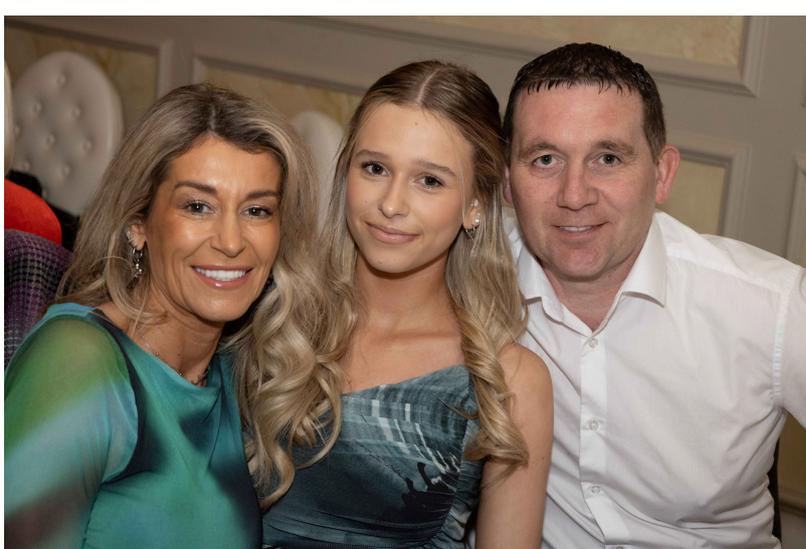


Primary School Art Competition
 Winner: Maisie-Kate Nixon
 Runners-up: Cara McCourt and Leah Orr



Secondary School Art Competition
 Winner: Georgia Forsythe
 Runners-up: Caleb Murphy and Niamh McCullagh

Advancing Racial Justice and Fairness
 Winner: Daniel Sanusi
 Runners-up: Peter Jennings and Kowther Osman



Anti-Racism Leader
 Winner: Takura Makoni
 Runners-up: Darren Ferguson and Donna McNally and Cheryl McElhinney

Community Champion
 Winner: Mohammed Idris
 Runners-up: Waterside Presbyterian Church



**Anti-Racism School
Winner: St Eugene's
PS**

**Runners up: St
Eithne's PS and
Lisnagelvin PS**

**Anti-Racism
Teacher**

Winner: Bronagh Fikri

**Runners up: Helen
Warby and Thomas
King**

Young Leader

Winner: Daniel Sanusi

**Runners-up: Frank
Nwanonyeni and
Inioluwa Olaosebikan**



**Lifetime
Achievement
Patricia Byrne**

**Special Recognition
Foyle Food Bank**



MEMBERS MAKING THEIR MARK

In an increasingly tumultuous world, positive stories are always welcome. Even more so when at their heart are people we know, that we have worked with and that we have helped. Here you can read about our long-time friend Bintan Ashorobi who has just launched her own range of spices. And on the next page, meet Mujeeb Rahman, the young Afghan asylum seeker aiming for the top in the world of boxing. Both stories gained substantial media attraction in print, radio and online.

BINTAN Ashorobi, who arrived in Derry as an international student, is recreating a taste of home through her own brand of spices.

She has lived in the city since 2021 when she started studying for a degree in data analytics at Ulster University.

Following her graduation the mother-of-two turned her attention to things more culinary – food being very much at the heart of Nigerian culture.

Spurred by the fact she was having to source ingredients from home to make traditional dishes like jollof rice and suya rice, Bintan decided to explore the possibility of making spices of her own.

With the help of Foodovation, she got to work on cooking up her own brand – Afrispices and Co.

Located within the Strand Road campus of the North West Regional College, Foodovation is a business centre of excellence for food development and technology as well as being a one-stop-shop for those looking to get their foot on the business ladder.

“Food is everything in Nigeria, I mean we absolutely love our food,” revealed Bintan.

“When I came here and couldn’t get the spices we use back home, I decided to look into creating my own.

“A friend of mine put me in touch with Foodovation in the College and they were so helpful. Initially I went to a meeting with them and explained what I was looking to do. They said yes, of course we can make that happen.

“They helped with the business sides of things, they linked me up with Derry City and Strabane District Council and they gave me the contacts so I could register my company.”

Once the administration requirements were complete, Bintan and a mentor assigned to her by Foodovation got to work blending and mixing.

“I said let’s start with two or three spices and in time we can create more. But I wanted to begin with just three.”

Jollof rice is a staple in West African cuisine. Made from rice, tomatoes, onions, peppers and distinctive spices, it is often enjoyed with chicken, beef, lamb, goat meat or fish.

Similarly, suya is a regular feature on the West African dinner table. It is a much-loved dish of grilled meat heavily spiced with a mix of peanuts and aromatics.

The third component is a spice designed to add a bit of excitement to a stir fry. It took seven months to get from initial discussions with Foodovation to actually having an Afrispices packet in hand, complete with unique logo.

It has been a busy time with lots of lessons learnt.

“I’ve had to do quite a few courses to learn about labelling, to find out about expiry dates and to learn about allergies. It has been a lot of work and now that we are finally at this point I’m sort of ‘okay, here we go then’.”

Members at the North West Migrants Forum got a taster session from Bintan recently when she showed them how to cook her various dishes.

They gave it a firm thumbs up, as did the local authority which has given Afrispices and Co a five star food hygiene rating.

“I’ve always wanted to have my own business and it’s exciting to see things coming together the way they have,” added the city’s newest entrepreneur.

“I’ve spoken to some local shops and they are interested in stocking my spices. They will be available shortly and hopefully people try them out and enjoy them.”



Bintan with her Afrispice range and below, during a recent cookery demonstration at NWMF.



Afghan teen aiming to become Derry's next boxing champion

MUJEEB Rahman began training out of Springtown Boxing Club 18 months ago. The eighteen-year-old quickly proved to be a natural and has already racked up three wins out of three, his most recent victory coming at the Co Derry Championships held in Swatragh. Mujeeb fled his home country in 2019, a year in which more than 3,400 civilians were killed and a further 7,000 injured. According to a report published by Amnesty International the brutal casualty rate made it “the deadliest conflict in the world for children”. Alone and aged just 13, he managed to make his way to Iran. From there he travelled to Turkey before spending time in Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Switzerland and France. His exhausting odyssey eventually ended when he arrived in Derry in 2023.

“Life was hard in Afghanistan, there was constant fighting and people were dying every day. It was very dangerous,” he said.

Springtown Boxing Club has been life changing, according to the teenager. And he is determined to keep moving forward and make his mark on the sporting world.

“I train three days a week in boxing but I train every day by myself in the gym. It’s hard work but I really enjoy it. It keeps me fit and it has helped me make new friends. My coaches Min and Jack are brilliant and have been really supportive. I’ve had three fights so far and I’ve won them all which is great. I intend to keep going and the dream would be to go on and become a professional fighter.”

As to which country he might represent should he make it to international standard, it remains to be seen.

“Ireland has helped me and supported me so I would like to fight for Ireland. But at the same time it would be great to represent Afghanistan. Not at the moment because the Taliban is there and things are really bad. For example everything is closed, girls and women aren’t allowed to go out. It’s very bad right now.

But maybe one day it will change.”

For a young man who has spent so many years on the move, Mujeeb says he feels like he has found his place in the world again.

“When I first came to Derry it was scary because I didn’t know anyone. But after about a month I started to meet people. I fell in love with the city and now I’ve fallen in love with boxing.”



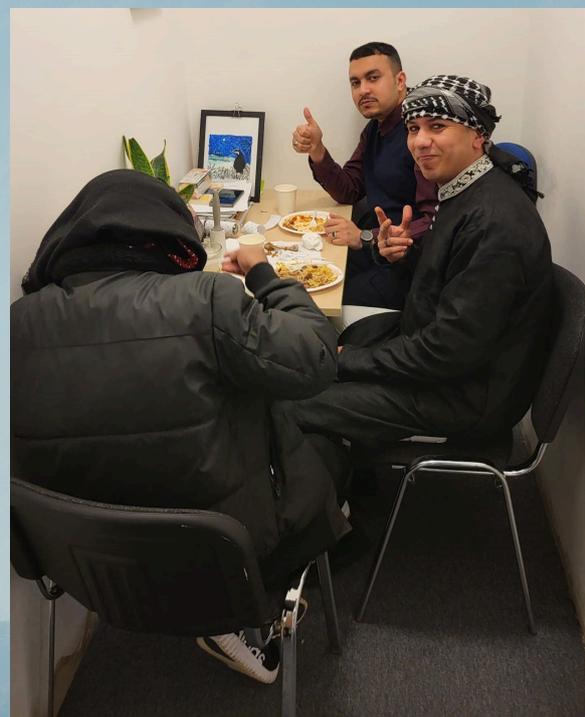
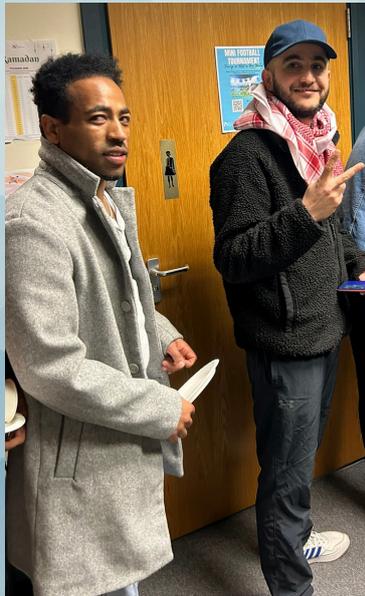
Mujeeb Rahman with Jack Devine, one of his coaches at Springtown Boxing Club where he has already punched his way to victory on three occasions.



Mujeeb in the gym where he spends most of his time, when he's not boxing of course!

NWMMF hosts Iftar

Our Muslim and Bahá'í members gathered in NWMMF headquarters on March 13 to enjoy an evening meal after the sun went down during Ramadan - It was a busy one!



North West Regional College awards three Asylum Seeker Scholarships

NORTH West Regional College, in collaboration with the North West Migrants Forum, has awarded three scholarships to asylum seekers living and studying in Derry, offering them the chance to pursue their academic and professional goals.

Diana Tamayo from Colombia, Ghadeer Fatouh from Syria and Micheal Mutebi from Uganda are the 2024/25 recipients of the NWRC Asylum Seeker Scholarship, an initiative that seeks to support the college's ongoing commitment to inclusivity and diversity. Mum of one Diana Tamayo moved to Derry in 2020. Having already achieved a degree in Psychology in Colombia, she decided to enrol on a Higher National Diploma course at the college and hopes to pursue a career in Early Years.



Front: Michael Mutebi, Diana Tamayo and Ghadeer Fatouh. Back row: Paul Sceeny of NWMF and NWRC representatives Bronagh Fikri and Gillian Moss.

Diana has volunteered in day care, special needs settings and in local primary schools.

Ghadeer Fatouh (17) who studies the Level 2 in Beauty Therapy as well as GCSEs at NWRC is an asylum seeker from Syria. Ghadeer wants to progress with her education so she can help support her family – her mum doesn't speak any English. Her brother Ahmed is also in the city and is hoping to enrol with NWRC in the future.

Micheal Mutebi is an asylum seeker from Uganda studying a Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care. Micheal, who has a passion for caring for people, has sought opportunities to care for others since he arrived in Northern Ireland and has been volunteering at Altnagelvin Hospital where he was able to gain first-hand experience of the care system, learn about patient support, and understand the importance of empathy and communication in providing effective care. Through his course at NWRC Micheal plans to pursue a career in the health and care sector and work to support individuals and communities, who are vulnerable or in need of care.

Congratulating all three scholarship recipients, our Interim Manager Paul Sceeny said, "The North West Migrants Forum has partnered with NWRC on several successful initiatives including the Asylum Seeker Scholarship. Accessing education can often be challenging for asylum seekers and refugees, but scholarships such as this can be life-changing for the recipients. Our thanks to NWRC for offering this opportunity to Diana, Ghadeer and Micheal, helping them build a new future in the north west."

Gillian Moss, Head of Client Services at NWRC added, "For the second year NWRC is awarding scholarships to provide crucial educational opportunities for individuals who have faced significant challenges in their lives. "Working in the Further and Higher Education sector we see every day how education and training are powerful tools for change.

"Once again we are delighted to work with the North West Migrants Forum to support the studies of asylum seekers with the right to study as part of their immigration status."

Meet the teachers...

Our English classes continue to be very popular with dozens of people gathering each week to learn a little more of the language. But what about those who provide the lessons – Liam Burns, Helen Warby, Ahmed Alezzi Saeed Ali Alwesabi, Rebecca McMonagle and Martha McClelland? We decided to find out a little bit more about those who bring so much to our organisation

Name: Liam Burns

Country/city of origin: Born in Derry, living in Donegal

Occupation now or previously: Now I'm a volunteer TEFL qualified teacher of English, previously I was a teacher of physics (to A-level)

Reason for volunteering with NWMF: The set up at the Forum is well suited to the teaching package which I most like to offer. Pop-up English is a series of ten minute one-to-one lessons, tailored on the spot to the needs of the students who turn up

What do you get from volunteering: A lot of satisfaction arising from warm, slightly intense interaction with a wide variety of people and the issues affecting their lives

Any hobbies or interests you may have: I own a forest. I also enjoy a little writing and photography, cooking and travel

What is your favourite way to relax: Reading a book in a hammock in my forest on summer days

Dream holiday destination: The scenic lakes and bays of New Zealand

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self: Chat to God on a daily basis and listen to him



Name: Martha McClelland

Country of origin: Born in San José, living in Derry

Occupation now or previously: Teacher of English as a foreign language

Reason for volunteering with NWMF: As I am blind, it gives me something to do. And also I get immense enjoyment from it

What do you get from volunteering: Again enjoyment and satisfaction. It gives me a sense of purpose, I love community and I love being active in it

Any hobbies or interests you may have: Lots! I play the flute, I enjoy walking, I love animals, particularly Rainbow Rehoming Centre. I also enjoy Audible books and I take a keen interest in politics, both local and international

What is your favourite way to relax: Listening to Audible and playing the flute

Dream holiday destination: Anywhere that is blind friendly, that is near a beach and that allows dogs

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self: Follow your dreams, regardless of the setbacks

Meet the teachers...

(Continued)

Name: Helen Warby

Country/city of origin: London, England

Occupation now or previously: English as a Foreign Language teacher

Reason for volunteering with NWMF: I love teaching, I love meeting people and I love the ethos of the Forum

What do you get from volunteering: Laughter, fun, enrichment and the pleasure of seeing my students progress

Any hobbies or interests you may have: Gardening, walking, photography

What is your favourite way to relax: Listening to music

Dream holiday destination: Japan, Barbados and Canada

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self: Enjoy every moment. Don't waste time on pursuits that don't enrich you or give you an opportunity for growth



Name: Rebecca McMonagle

Country/city of origin: Derry

Occupation now or previously: I work as a data analyst

Reason for volunteering with NWMF: I began volunteering as a way of gaining experience teaching English

What do you get from volunteering: I enjoy helping the women I teach progress their English speaking skills. I also enjoy the sense of community fostered by the North West Migrants Forum

Any hobbies or interests you may have: I like to hike, learn Spanish, play the violin and occasionally I surf

What is your favourite way to relax: Reading and spending time with friends and family

Dream holiday destination: Japan, Spain or New Zealand

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self: Do more of the things you enjoy in your spare time. Worry less and when you are older, don't bother getting a smartphone

Remember, you can follow us on all main social media channels:



Meet the teachers...

(continued)

Name: Ahmed Alezzi Saweed Ali Alwesabi

Country/city of origin: Yemen, now living in Derry

Occupation now or previously: Interpreter and English as a Second Language teacher

Reason for volunteering with NWMF: To help refugees, those seeking asylum and anyone in need really

What do you get from volunteering: Love and respect

Any hobbies or interests you may have: Making new friends is an interest of mine

What is your favourite way to relax: Having a wee coffee alone and listening to my own music

Dream holiday destination: Old Sana'a

What advice would you give to your 16-year-old self: Study harder and get married in our thirties



BITS 'N' BOBS

There is always something going on here at the North West Migrants Forum. Here is another brief photographic round-up of some of the workshops and activities we have held since the turn of the year



In February we partnered with the Irish Network Against Racism and the Bloody Sunday Trust on the development of a new North West Anti-Racism Charter. →

While in January we linked up with Advice NI for an eVisa clinic to help people make the transition from physical BRP cards →



And we even had an Irish language taster session courtesy of Conlath Ní Raifeartaigh of Céad Mile Failte!

We have held numerous health workshops, several of them focusing on cancer in both men and women. Thanks to Hive and to the Women's Resource and Development Agency for their help.

Thank you to our funders and sponsors - without your continued support none of our work would be possible



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Executive Office

We always make a point of supporting the local economy

Here are just some of the businesses and services the North West Migrants Forum has used over the past three months...

Doherty's Home Bakery

Banba Design

Windmill Media

Embassy Property Ltd

Limavady Printing

Poundland

Boots

The Ebrington Hotel

Musgrave Cash & Carry

Visit Derry

Mark Hamill Photography

Jonny Collins Videography

Clinton's

Dominos Pizza

iPrint

Ulsterbus

Centra

Tesco

PNP Solutions

Abel & Flynn

The Works

Foyle Taxi Co

Home Bargains

Unit 7

Marie McGrellis Photography

Zaytoun

The Craft Shop

Brunswick Moviebowl

In the words of the great Maya Angelou:
'We may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated.'

YOU CAN KEEP UP TO DATE WITH OUR WORK ON OUR WEBSITE WWW.NWMF.ORG.UK OR ON:

