



July 2020

# Newsletter

# MiFriendly Cities

**Welcome to the first MiFriendly Cities newsletter!**

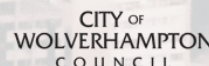
Welcome to the first in a series of quarterly newsletters about MiFriendly Cities! Now that the MiFriendly Cities project is in its final year of delivery, we want to share our findings and successes, and the impact MiFriendly Cities initiatives are having across our communities.

Over the last few months, the Coronavirus health crisis has affected every aspect of our society, and our project is no exception. We have all shared the uncertainty and insecurity of a new world and new ways of being – something that many people with a migrant background are already familiar with.

We will share the amazing ways our projects and participants have adapted to the Covid 19 crisis and assisted in the community, and how the MiFriendly Cities partnership has reacted with flexibility to continue delivering services and activities.

## **Firstly, a quick overview about what this *MiFriendly Cities* thing is?**

A migration-friendly city is one in which the social, civic, and economic contributions of refugees and migrants are unlocked and embraced. Across our incubator sites in Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and Coventry, we aim to achieve this with activities across themes of employability and social enterprise, active citizenship, narrative and storytelling. You can find out more about what makes a MiFriendly City [here](#).



## Citizens in Action: People Power

The project partners have been busy delivering training for a whole network of Citizens in Action. Amongst them:

- **Community Health Champions**
- **Community Journalists**
- **Citizen Social Scientists**



Work on these initiatives has been focused on recognising the unique qualities of a person with lived experience, or a community member, and the power those voices can have.

The **Community Health Champions** who have been trained by the project are disseminating messages about public health priorities, healthcare entitlements and service access across communities whom statutory partners historically struggle to reach.

The **Community Journalists** are equipping themselves and others to put their voice centre stage in the migration discussion, so that the voices of migrants are telling their own story.

The **Citizen Social Scientists** are using qualitative and quantitative techniques on their own research projects to unlock information from within communities that will help inform conversations, decisions and future investment that affect those very groups and individuals.

## Lighting 50 fires: grants to support social innovation, enterprise and experiences

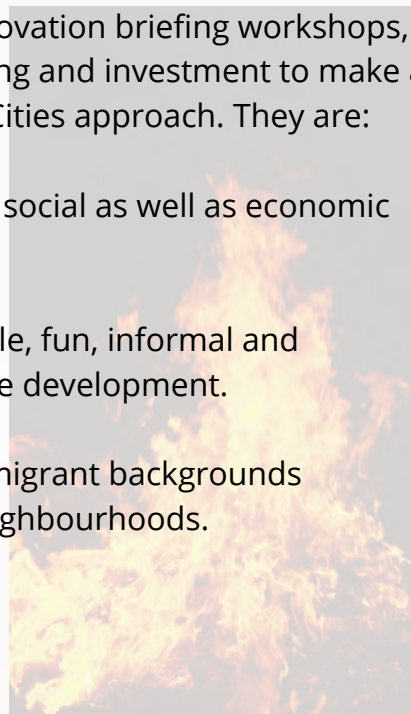
Innovation and a focus on the power of community voices and action have been key themes of our delivery approach over the last year. Reams of research makes the argument for the overrepresentation of innovation, entrepreneurship and resourcefulness amongst migrants, many of whom, after all, overcame significant barriers to make new lives in the West Midlands. More and more, the power of communities is being recognised and we have prioritised a grassroots-led approach that identifies solutions within communities.

So, after consultations, numerous panels, training, and innovation briefing workshops, we have lit Fifty Fires! 50 groups have been allocated funding and investment to make a difference at a local level and to champion the MiFriendly Cities approach. They are:

**Social Enterprises:** migrant led start-ups that are bringing social as well as economic value to our local areas.

**Share My Language Projects:** groups offering an accessible, fun, informal and purposeful approach to community-based English language development.

**Social Innovation Projects:** individuals and groups from migrant backgrounds applying their ideas of answers to social challenges our neighbourhoods.



## Covid 19 Response

The COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic held the power to halt the good work the MiFriendly Cities project has been doing towards the integration of communities across the West Midlands. The project, primarily built on face-to-face activity, had to be completely reimagined in the wake of new social distancing measures.

Due to MiFriendly Cities' flexible delivery and innovative thinking, mixed with a drive to do good, the project has withstood the unprecedented challenges of 2020. The following 4 steps ensured our ability to sustain:

1. **Continue to bring communities together, digitally**
2. **Keeping communities Informed**
3. **Invest in the cause**
4. **Continue to Invest in and empower people**

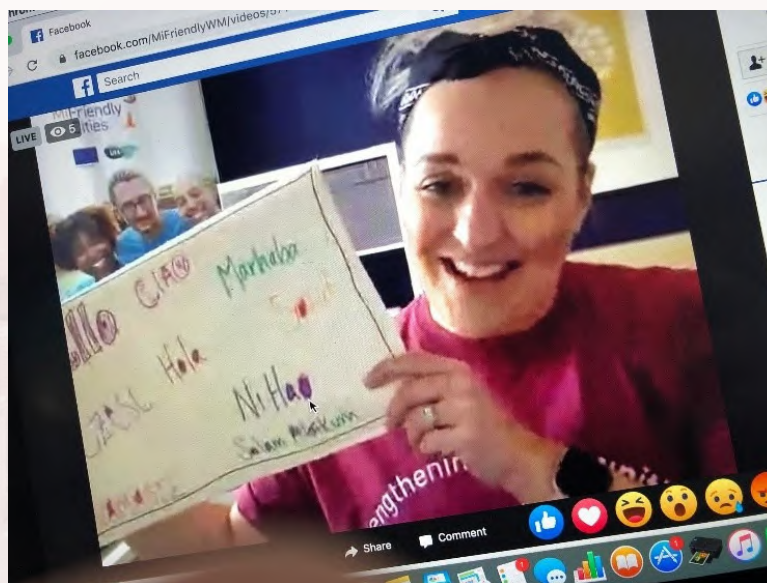
## Covid 19 Response

### 1. Continue to bring communities together, digitally

**Working from home and being unable to partake in 'normal' life, left people vulnerable to isolation and poor mental health. The MiFriendly Cities project saw it as essential that projects providing social inclusion and support should continue.**

**Rhymetime**, a Share My Language (SML) activity typically looks at bringing people from different communities together in a physical space, to share in culture and language exchange in informal environments. They often took place in libraries across the region, introducing young children and their carers to new languages and cultures through greetings and nursery rhymes. However, this needed to be adapted so that participants could stay home and stay safe.

It was decided to trial Share My Language Rhymetime sessions via Facebook Live, an online streaming platform expanding access, increasing potential reach, and providing a safe environment for everyone.



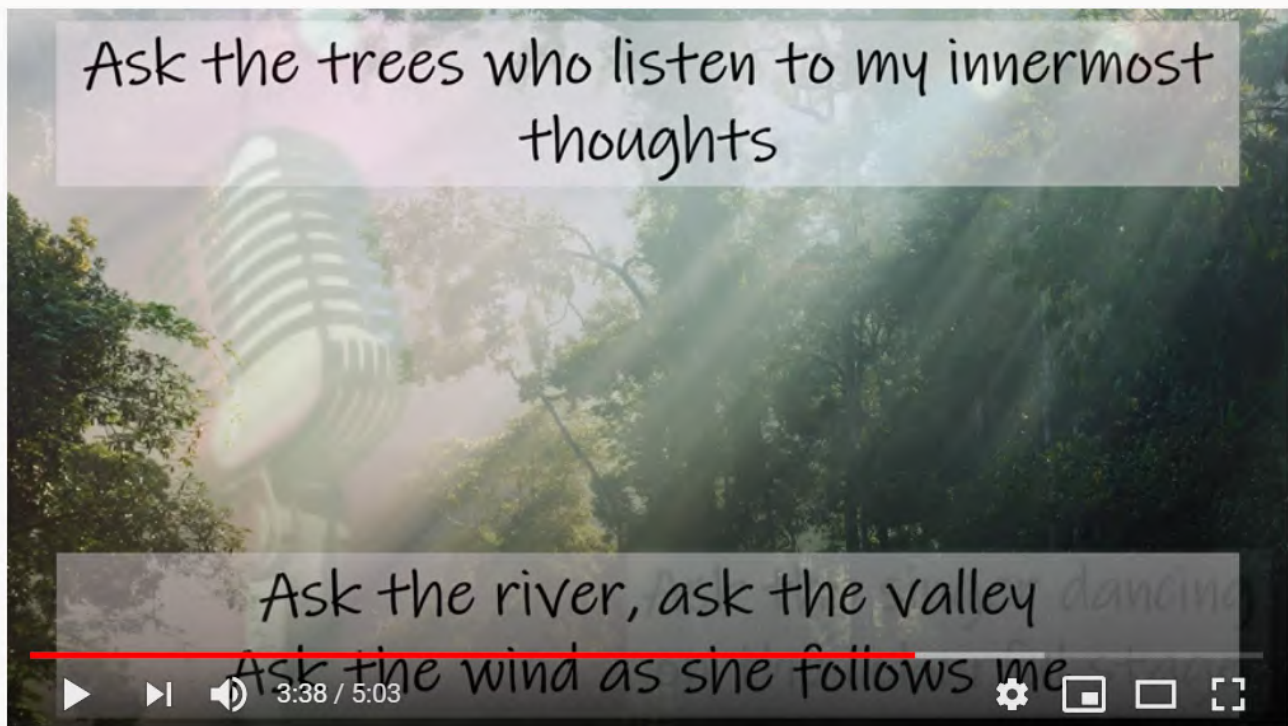
MiFriendly Cities staff were concerned about the blurred work-life boundaries for many carers of young children in the West Midlands, given that most were suddenly required to work from home. As a result, these new digital sessions aimed to be 30 minutes of fun-filled activities for children aged 0-5 years old, giving adults a much-needed break from organising engaging at-home activities.

The online **Rhymetime** sessions followed weekly themes, such as child-friendly mental health awareness, and coronavirus regulations explained via story telling. They also continued to encourage language exchange, saying hellos and goodbyes in a variety of ways. These videos have accumulated over 760 views on Facebook and staff are now looking at how to keep the momentum going.

## Covid 19 Response

### 1. Continue to bring communities together digitally

Another SML funded project **Stories of Hope and Home** uses the art of storytelling to engage and empower asylum seekers and refugees. Stephanie designs and delivers the sessions and has found that they have proven even more needed during the lockdown.



#### We Tell Stories

The group's pre-existing WhatsApp chat for participants has been invaluable in connecting people and the group also continue to meet twice weekly using Zoom. Stories of Hope and Home has used some of its SML grant to buy participants data packages, where they could not afford it themselves, to ensure that none of the group face isolation during the Coronavirus. You can listen to a sample of their beautiful poetry [here](#).

## Covid 19 Response

### 2. Keeping communities informed

When we are facing a global pandemic, both digital and real-world 'word-of-mouth' can result in misinformation. Access to professional and trusted medical information has always been a necessity for empowering individuals and communities, but during this unique health crisis it is vital. Considering this, MiFriendly Cities looked at providing additional support to our existing activities that can help fight Coronavirus directly or indirectly – like the project's **Health Champions**.

Our **Health Champions** have been trained through the MiFriendly Cities project to engage with their local communities, representing them as they engage with health professionals.



The **Health Champions** were in a key role to ensure that the correct messages surrounding Coronavirus regulations were reaching people, that myths were proven wrong, and that communities had the chance to bring their Coronavirus-related questions and concerns to healthcare professionals. Therefore Birmingham City Council and Coventry City Council organised for their directors of Public Health to take part in online sessions with the Health Champions. Key messages relayed were:

- Symptoms and how and when to socially isolate
- How to seek health advice if a person thinks they have COVID-19
- How to access the support available during the crisis such as food parcels (if eligible)
- How to volunteer to support the vulnerable such as befriending via the telephone

MiFriendly Cities' **Social Innovations** have also been using their standing in their local communities to empower those around them.

**Biniam**, a leader in the Eritrean community, has utilized his '**Transitions**' project to run online information sessions. They have reached over 60 members of the community, largely but not exclusively from Eritrean backgrounds.

These sessions contained information from an NHS worker about health, from an employment expert about migrants' employment rights, and legal advice from Central England Law Centre. This has helped families who have, for instance, been threatened with eviction to access support from the right people.

## Covid 19 Response

### 2. Keeping communities informed

**Ake** runs the **'What I Need to Know'** project, specialising in fighting for migrants' employment rights and has also worked alongside **Biniam** to support the Eritrean community. He has also used lockdown to establish a migrant-led trade union. The trade union will kick-start activity by supporting people through employment rights issues at this unprecedented time. To support this, he has been working with Central England Law Centre, (CELC), to develop employment rights information sheets.

As well as supporting other initiatives across the MiFriendly Cities project, **Central England Law Centre** has been quick to create new resources to further support the public and frontline workers to find out about their rights during the Coronavirus crisis. Regular information packs were produced and distributed to organisations, projects, schools and other safe spaces in the community. The accurate and timely information allowed CELC to combat misinformation and equip participants with reassurance about their rights, and who to contact if they needed more guidance.

*"(CELC's) advice has truly supported many of our parents who may feel fearful/scared due to their present statuses... we really need this level of intense support to continue as it has been especially valuable during this current pandemic" - St Elizabeth's Catholic Primary School in Coventry.*

## Covid 19

### 3. Supporting the cause

MiFriendly Cities has attempted to alleviate the Coronavirus crisis by mobilising the project's various shared resources and initiatives.

One way in which MiFriendly Cities has helped directly is through utilising the project's equipment to keep front line workers safe. For example, **FabLab** Coventry used its 3D printing machinery, previously used to train migrants, to create parts of personal protective equipment (PPE) for key workers. Furthermore, PPE originally purchased for use in Wolverhampton's MiFriendly Cities Pop-Up Furniture Factory has since been donated to those who have more need to protect themselves and others due to their job.



## Covid 19 Response

### 3. Supporting the cause

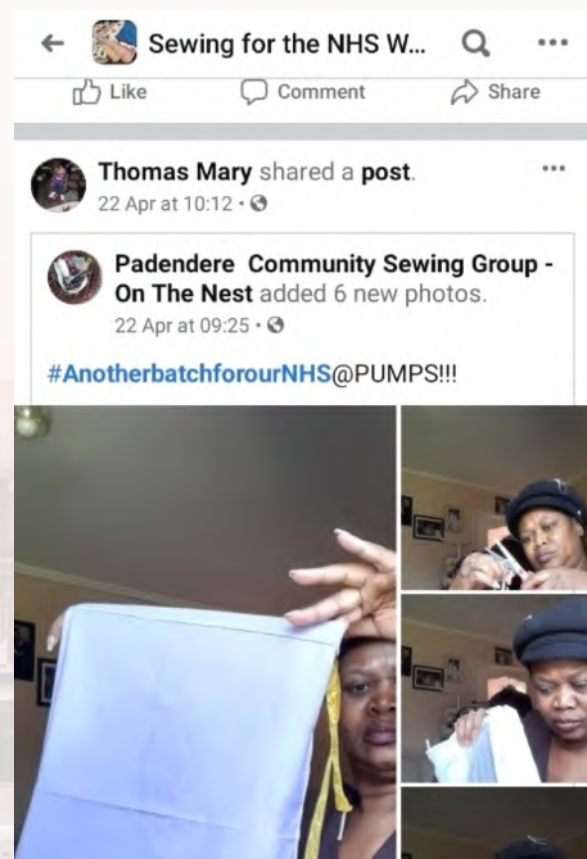
**Social Innovation and Enterprise projects**, funded through MiFriendly Cities, have also been directly fighting coronavirus by delivering food to those who need it and creating home-made PPE equipment.

Mary, born in Zimbabwe and proud resident of Wolverhampton for nearly 20 years, set up the '**Pandendere Community Sewing Group**' in 2019. Mary wanted to give women in her local area a place to learn, gain skills and share their stories in confidence

Whilst the crisis has stopped the group from meeting, this hasn't stopped Mary's drive to invest in her community! She's been putting her sewing skills to good use, making face masks and donating these to front-line workers.

Mary has also been delivering food to at-risk families identified by either the Zimbabwe Association or local project 'FareShare'. Mary has said, "At a time like this we cannot let a virus breakdown community, we must come together more than ever to continue learning from each other's' culture and lifestyle".

**Akwaba** – a childcare oriented social enterprise - has continued to look after the children of key workers, whilst their carers continue to support the country in the fight against Coronavirus. For those who are looking after their children at home, its founder Luc has been offering free advice on home schooling.



## Covid 19 Response

### 4. Continue to invest in people

Looking to the future, newly arrived communities face a more volatile labour market. It is for this reason that during the pandemic, MiFriendly Cities has continued to invest in its participants. To train, upskill, and ready them for the new 'normal'.

MiFriendly English for Speakers of other Languages, (ESOL), and employability provisions have continued digitally. ESOL classes are held on video calls with clients, and employability staff have one-to-one phone/video calls with their clients to ensure maximum support is possible.

Furthermore, the project has helped workers that have not been able to work during the pandemic. **Spring Action**, a professional cleaning service social enterprise trained by Coventry University Social Enterprise, (another partner of MiFriendly Cities), has furloughed all its staff. Nonetheless, they have been working with the British Institute of Cleaning Services to provide staff with further training on, for instance, infection control. So far, 3 cleaners have been trained in cross contamination.

Going forward, Spring Action hope to offer back-to-work deep cleaning and sanitising services to businesses that are due to reopen and it has sourced the PPE required for its cleaners to work safely.

**Media Lab** participants are documenting the fight against Covid 19 by interviewing migrants in their community who are doing something positive during the pandemic, and documenting how communities are coming together, through articles, interviews and videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oM72ZR8HQ0>



**Special online Media Lab training workshop for migrants and refugees**

Migrant Voice is hosting a special online Media Lab training session for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers on Tuesday 26th May 2020.

There will be 2 interactive workshops:

**How to conduct a media interview:** Salman Mirza, a Birmingham based migration worker and multimedia reporter, will lead a workshop on how to conduct and engage in a media interview, as both an interviewer and an interviewee.

**How to write a news interview:** Daniel Nelson, a veteran UK journalist who has worked across Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Nigeria, Uganda and the Philippines, will lead a session on how to write up a media interview into an article or news piece.

**10:45am - 11:00am:** Zoom connections and welcome  
**11:00am - 12:00pm:** Session 1 – Media interview engagement skills with Salman Mirza  
**12:00pm - 1:00pm:** Session 2 – Media interview writing skills with Daniel Nelson  
**1:00pm - 2:00pm:** LUNCH BREAK  
**2:00pm - 2:40pm:** Joint activity & feedback session - Salman Mirza and Daniel Nelson  
**2:40pm - 3:00pm:** Wind down, finishing off projects, evaluation, announcements.

**Date:** Tuesday 26th May 2020 | 10.45am - 3.00pm  
**Online:** via Zoom (log-in details will be sent out when you RSVP)

The session is free and open to migrants in the West Midlands. To register to join, please contact: [salbin@migrantvoice.org](mailto:salbin@migrantvoice.org) or 07821 147 541.



migrant **MEDIA LAB**

EUROPEAN UNION  
UfA  
MiFriendly Cities

This project is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative.

## Covid 19 Response

### 4. Continue to invest in people

More recently, participants have received training from photographer Nathan McGill to catch images that celebrate **'Symbols of Home'** – a social media campaign MiFriendly Cities ran to mark national Refugee Week. Health Champions also created a series of 6 videos in 6 languages that was shared across social media channels.

## Refugee Week

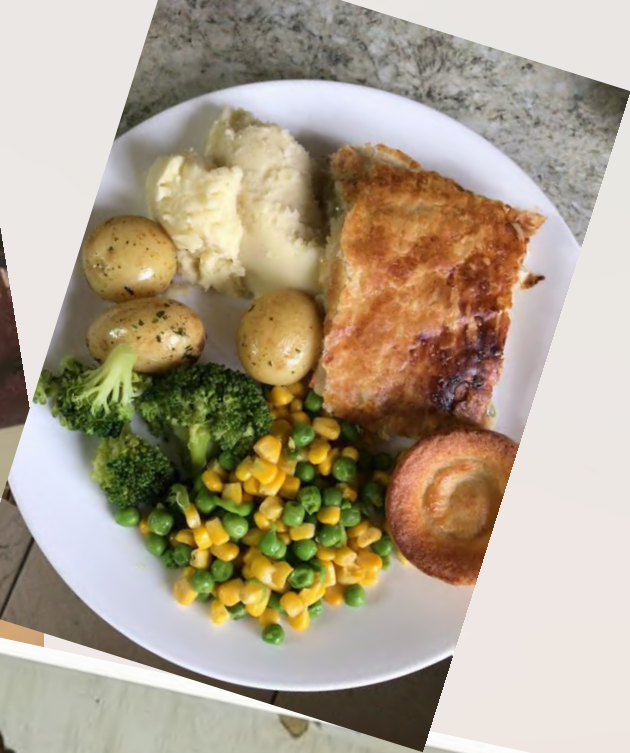
- MiFriendly Cities ran the **'Symbols of Home'** campaign throughout **Refugee Week**, and it proved very successful attracting new followers to social media sites
- Posts, tweets and photos showed symbols of home that included music, poetry, cooking pots and family

Here is a selection of the wonderful images and thoughts shared on social media:

**Home is a symbol of comfort, safety, trust, and all other positivity. I feel it is to return home to the comfortable atmosphere of my children and to my family."**  
**#Walsall**



**This is my Dutch Pot, this cooks the most delicious food. This reminds me of family time at home in #Jamaica." - #Birmingham**



## Inclusion is the way forward: Our lessons

MiFriendly Cities strives to be an inclusive and accessible project, with many opportunities for migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and UK-born groups to get involved. We consider ourselves quite unique and very lucky in that respect. Two unexpected takeaways have come out of this inclusive approach:

- Those golden moments when coming together for a specific purpose removes all barriers. Your background is not important; your language is not important; your immigration status is not important. The only thing of any importance is the task at hand! Creating more of these moments and making sure they don't just exist as moments in time is a big priority for us over the final project year
- Being able to work meaningfully with people who are still in the asylum process is a huge benefit of the MiFriendly Cities approach. From employability and skills profiling, to Community Health Champions training, to Digital Fabrication training – many people who are still in the asylum process and have engaged with the project want to make a meaningful difference in their own lives and the lives of others. For a lot of these participants, MiFriendly Cities has offered relief from isolation and loneliness, improved confidence and wellbeing, and left people better equipped for playing an active role in their own life and the life of their community. The Coronavirus health crisis served to illuminate this truth

## 2020: Perfect vision?

In November 2019, we took the time to celebrate all of these individuals and groups and the way the MiFriendly Cities approach has been embraced by so many here in the West Midlands, with our half-way event in the stunning Coventry Cathedral, and part of the Global Peace Forum. We welcomed a panel of experts by profession, and experts by experience, and both added so much insight into everything we're seeking to achieve in the region.



A few months prior to this, the project convened its first international and virtual Sounding Board – a meeting of minds from across the UK and Europe. The group took on the important question of “but so what?” – we’re doing all of this, but how do we know it’s making a difference and how can we convince other people of this? Since then we’ve held two more Sounding Boards, looking at the uniqueness of grassroots-led projects like MiFriendly Cities, and at how projects like ours can ensure a positive and sustainable legacy. You can read more about these round table discussions [here](#).

## Watch this space – in the pipeline



A brief scan of the MiFriendly Cities horizon throws up some exciting work to take note of over the next few months:

- We have completed a survey of over 1,500 residents in the MiFriendly Cities project area to assess the “MiFriendliness” of our cities to date. The findings are in and we hope to publish before year end
- In Coventry, we have created a steering group to support Health Champions, made up of MiFC project partners, the City Council and colleagues from Public Health. We are currently seeking funding to grow this activity and carry it on beyond the lockdown
- The MiFriendly Cities mobile art exhibition is being curated over the next few months, by and with migrants, to inspire conversations about the contributions of migrants to our cities
- The Pop-Up Furniture Factory in Wolverhampton launched in January 2020 and will play a significant part in Wolverhampton delivery for the remainder of the year, as training for home makeovers on the homes of vulnerable adults and care leavers is delivered at the site, and online
- The build at Hope House in Coventry to create a coworking and café space adjacent to the Coventry Refugee & Migrant Centre is well underway and scheduled to complete in Autumn 2020



- To support employment opportunities for migrants, work placement candidates are being coached for interviews and are also completing a distance learning Customer Service course. MiFC's Digital Fabrication course is also moving online - working with the Open College Network, new online content and material has been devised that will be piloted in July and rolled out over the summer. We've also reviewed our Guide for Employers and a new version has been uploaded to the MiFriendly Cities website. <https://mifriendlycities.co.uk/resources/>

## Bye For Now

That's all For now folks, we hope that this newsletter has captured the essence of Mifriendly Cities and what's been happening so far. We also hope that we've demonstrated the wonderful ways that our participants have not only coped with the Coronavirus health crisis but also joined with their communities to combat the pandemic and provide support to all.

As lockdown measures are easing and we return to more normal times please take care and stay healthy.

If you'd like to contribute to this newsletter or comment on its content, please contact [dawn.x.murray@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:dawn.x.murray@birmingham.gov.uk).

Best wishes & bye for now.

