



October 2020 Newsletter

MiFriendly Cities

Welcome to the 2nd Edition of the MiFriendly Cities Newsletter

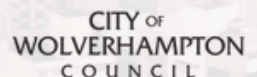
Hello everybody, and welcome to the 2nd edition of the MiFriendly Cities newsletter.

The Summer has slipped into Autumn, and in the long shadows of golden evening sunlight, we are still learning to live with the shadow of Coronavirus.

In our July newsletter we celebrated how our projects, and especially our participants, demonstrated commitment to their communities by using their skills and innovation to battle and redress the effects of the virus.

Our stories exemplified the individual resilience and strength of our participants, as throughout the lockdown, over Spring and Summer, they found ways to continue to deliver services to our communities and adjust to new, social and physical distancing constraints.

In this newsletter, we will catch up with some of those great people and projects, find out about current news, and future developments.



But firstly, for those who are not familiar with the project and didn't catch the last newsletter, here's more detail about MiFriendly Cities:

What is MiFriendly Cities?

A migration-friendly city is one in which the social, civic, and economic contributions of refugees and migrants are unlocked and embraced. Across **Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and Coventry**, we aim to achieve this with activities that encompass themes of employability and social enterprise, active citizenship, narrative and storytelling.



Our projects train and equip participants to become **Community Health Champions, Community Journalists and Citizen Social Scientists**.

We lit Fifty Fires by allocating 50 groups funding and investment to make a difference at a local level and to champion the MiFriendly Cities approach.

They are **Social Enterprises, Share My language Projects and Social Innovation Projects**.

If you want more information about MiFriendly Cities, please click [here](#).

Let's Catch Up

Employment & Enterprise

To unlock entrepreneurial skills which benefit communities, MiFC supports refugees and migrants with businesses start-ups. MiFC provides specialised support to guide people every step of the way. Projects also support people with pathways into employment using education, training and job application support.

Spring Action

Over the last 3 months Spring Action Cleaning, a social enterprise supporting refugees and migrants, has been at the forefront of helping Coventry's communities to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.



During lockdown, Spring Action was reluctant to leave any employees without income and through the Government's Furlough Scheme, the company managed to support 100% of its staff.

They had the business acumen to realise that after lockdown there was a potential business opportunity in back-to-work deep cleans. Therefore staff received Cross Contamination training via The British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICS) and the Government's New Infection Control Guidelines were also incorporated into training.

Consequently Spring Action was well equipped to combat Covid-19 when restrictions began to lift. Over summer, staff have completed 13 deep cleans! Customers include Fargo Village, Citizens Advice and Positive Youth Foundation. The enterprise's hard work has allowed many to start returning to 'normal' life safely.



The success of Spring Action Cleaning is a shining example of how migrant focused businesses create integration and cohesion supporting the local economy and community. We hope its success will encourage other organisations to support migrant led social enterprises. For the full story see:

<https://mifriendlycities.co.uk/mifriendly-social-enterprise-helps-coventry-return-to-work/>

Your Elegance and My Angel

Ahmad and Ghousoun, a husband and wife team of social entrepreneurs, opened their clothes shop just 5 months before the global pandemic caused a complete lockdown in the UK. They had worked hard to achieve their dream of making and selling their own design clothing range.



The unprecedented lockdown of shopping centres couldn't have happened at a worse time for the fledgling business, and unable to trade for months, its future was seriously threatened and business plans became worthless.

The shop is now open again, and Ahmad and Ghousoun are getting back on their feet. They've implemented Covid-19 precautions so customers can return to the shop, peruse and purchase their beautiful clothing and wonderful creations.

MiFriendly Cities has been in constant communication with the couple, listening to their concerns, helping re-plan the future, supporting them with marketing, and negotiating with the council for financial support such as eligible tax breaks and rent reductions.

So, if you've got a special occasion to attend, get down to:

Your Elegance and My Angel

20 Broad street Wolverhampton.

They also offer dress making, alterations and an ironing service. It's well worth a visit!



Who's for a Haircut?

Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre has launched the second instalment of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, this time in barbering. Using a subject area that participants are interested in taking up, or continuing employment in, has proven to be a very effective way to improve English learning. The course focuses on teaching the language skills needed by participants, as well as basic business management and professional skills.



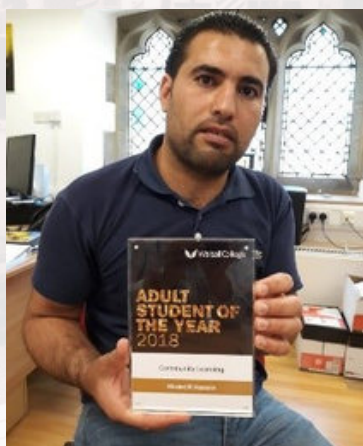
To deliver the ESP course MiFriendly Cities has partnered with local employers Dash and Noory from **Dash's Cut** situated on the Foleshill Road in Coventry.

Experts in their field, they've helped train many new barbers within the city, and over the years have provided work to many new arrivals seeking employment. They have a combined experience of over 20 years in the industry and will be talking through the essentials of what makes a barber. Guidance will be through tutorials, videos and online/face to face classes.

Student of the Year!

The Refugee and Migrant Centre in Wolverhampton has been supporting Khaled, a resettled Syrian refugee, since he arrived in the UK in 2017.

Khaled arrived without any English and was supported to create an action plan for his development and integration into the city. He began to study English at Walsall College and by the end of term in 2018, Khaled received an award for best English student in the community, passing his Entry 2 ESOL exam!



He has since undertaken a community interpreting level 2 course and started focusing on employment. MiFriendly Cities helped him to create a CV, job search and practice interview techniques. In August 2020, he was given an interview at RMC and has recently started in a new paid role as a Resettlement Caseworker, helping newly arrived Syrians in Wolverhampton to progress through the same journey he has gone through.

Social and Community Support

Social and community networks are essential to create migrant friendly cities. MiFC delivers Share My language projects where people come together and use language as a unifier. We deliver, and we also support participants to deliver innovative social projects where the fundamental aim is to provide community support. The opportunity to help others and contribute to community increases a sense of belonging and unity.

Share My language Projects

Migrant Empowerment Group (MEG)

in Wolverhampton started a Share My Language project in mid-September delivering online cooking, jewellery and mask making sessions.

The funding provided will support with food hampers for participants to learn how to cook African and Jamaican food, in addition to making masks out of socks and tops! Online sessions will be shared across social media, alternatively some of them will be recorded offline to allow access to those who cannot make the sessions. Link to website [here](#).



Stories of Hope & Home

We met Stephanie Neville, project coordinator of this wonderful poetry and story-telling group in the last newsletter. We heard how during lockdown she managed to continue weekly meetings online, and in July the group had a special guest star - Scotland's own poet laureate Jackie Kay, whose visit inspired and encouraged the group's creative writing. Get the full story [here](#).

We caught up with the group because we heard that a camping trip had been organised!

"We know that stepping out of our normal surroundings and spending quality time together has helped us build a community where people feel safe and valued. Opportunities to do so felt much more limited this year but with the easing of restrictions through the summer, more became possible and at the end of August we felt able to arrange a group camping trip.

Although we didn't physically go very far (we were only a ten-minute train ride from central Birmingham), in some ways we found ourselves worlds away from the same four walls that have been the backdrop to the last few months.

It is amazing what a difference fresh air and friendship makes. The weather was, well, typical British camping weather I suppose!

But we dodged the showers, ensured the guy ropes were tightly attached, and piled up the blankets.



And then, there in that space, we talked about the silly and the serious, we learned with, and from each other, we told stories, we renewed friendships. Whatever the weather might have been doing, there was a huge amount of warmth in the smiles and laughter we shared."

Stephanie Neville



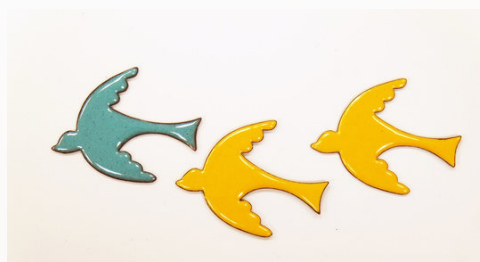
"I don't really know the right word to say thank you all the energy, love and everything they offered us in that camping event. Only God knows. Thank you to all the mates to be kind with everyone"

Shelanu is a Birmingham based Women's Craft Collective. Shelanu, means 'belonging to us', and is a collective of migrant and refugee women working with **Craftspace**. Their ethos is to use craft to develop skills, confidence and well-being through social enterprise.



"It's a place to learn and try new skills, a place where I can feel connected and free to try new ideas and express my artistic side... It's a positive way to contribute and find your place in a new place."

The participants produce high quality craft inspired by their new home, the city of Birmingham, and their experiences of migration. As well as learning creative skills, the women are supported to improve their English, learn business skills and run workshops for the community.



Shelanu used to meet weekly in the Craftspace offices in Birmingham. During lockdown they have been meeting via Zoom. MiFriendly Cities through Share My Language has supported the project to send materials out to participants. Copper for enamelling, or making origami birds for jewellery, to put together when the workshop reopens.



The weekly Zooms are a chance for everyone to catch up, and they've been talking about a collection for next year based on folklore and legends from everyone's countries, some members have done drawings for this. Others are developing their own work which they share pictures of on the group's What's App.

<https://shelanu.craftspace.co.uk/>

Social Innovation Projects

Pop Up Furniture Factory - Home Makeovers

The Pop-Up Furniture Factory in Wolverhampton launched in January 2020 and has been a resounding success.

Participants are taught skills such as furniture upcycling and decorating, and the project has played an integral part in the city's response to homelessness, and the Covid-19 health crisis.

During the lockdown, homeless people were provided with short term emergency accommodation by the local authority. Now these people are being supported to move to permanent tenancies.

MiFriendly Cities have supported those moving into independent living by re-decorating properties and donating upcycled furniture to make places feel like homes. So far over 1,000 items of furniture have been upcycled or provided for new homes.

Six home makeovers have taken place since July 2020. The new tenants include homeless clients who have left emergency Covid-19 accommodation, and residents leaving hospital.

The Pop-Up Furniture Factory is working closely with the Adult Social Care Team at Wolverhampton City Council to provide makeovers to vacant accommodation and turn them into welcoming and liveable homes for vulnerable people.



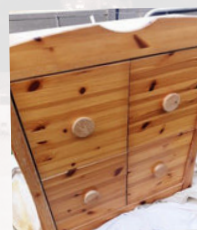
One of the 6 people who received a home makeover is a young adult who had been living on the streets for 6 months prior to the Covid-19 health crisis.

With multi-agency support delivered whilst he was in emergency accommodation, he has now moved to his own independent home.

He said "the furniture I have received from this project has made me happy and I'm so excited for what the future will hold for me in my own tenancy. I'm so thankful to the project and partners who have supported me".

The young man's new home was furnished with a wardrobe, coffee table and a sofa amongst other items.

Further training sessions are being planned for participants under new Covid-19 H&S restrictions and another exciting venture on the way, is a repair café, using a mobile van.



Before



After

MigrationWork support 13 Social Innovation projects funded by MiFC, with advice and guidance. Over the summer this has included training on funding sources and bid writing, and we'd like to thank Dipali Chandra for her support so far.

Two leaders of MiFC Social Innovation projects, Laura Nyahuye, who leads **Maokwo**, and is an artist, and Loraine Masiya Mponela, of **Coventry Asylum & Refugee Action Group**, made a film during Refugee Week 2020 called 'Mberekho I:'

"I made Mberekho I: using materials that tell the story of love, commitment, suffering, faith, hope, nurturing. Mberekho I: is conveying the tension, challenges that asylum seekers, refugees, migrants face due to separation from their children." Watch the film [here](#).

Another project, '**Families in Conversation**', ran a series of training sessions in the summer to support families in communicating about mental health. Their project, initially intended for Wolverhampton residents, reached an international audience, with people signing up from outside the UK too.



And the '**Game of Homes**' project, run by **BME Housing Consortium**, has adapted to Covid-19 by making paper-based resources, including quizzes for people about housing and tenancy rights. These activity packs have been delivered to people's homes, so the whole family can benefit from the learning.



Community Health Champions

MiFriendly Cities has run a succession of training sessions providing participants with expert guidance and health information to enable them to advise communities who may otherwise encounter barriers in accessing this information.

In Wolverhampton the Health Champions have supported the 'Back to School' Wolverhampton project. Materials in different languages are produced for parents with school aged children. They encouraged children going back to School in September and highlight safety measures individual schools have implemented to protect children and teachers.

Conversations have taken place with the Wolverhampton Public Health team to discuss the legacy and importance of the Health Champions role within Wolverhampton and how this resource can support future Public Health campaigns as well as Covid-19 messaging.

Wolverhampton Public Health are keen for the Health Champions to support other organisations across the City in distributing key messages to migrant communities, especially BAME communities. We are currently looking at how the Health Champions can get involved with Black Country Healthcare in providing messages around mental health awareness especially as it is important during the current situation we find ourselves in.



Community Health Champions in Birmingham have been keeping themselves updated by attending a series of Public Health Bhealthy webinars targeted at citizens who have direct reach into communities and established, trusted relationships. The aim of the webinar series is to help improve community health and wellbeing and reduce risks of becoming seriously ill from Covid-19.

The Health Champions are building their own legacy by planning to establish the group as a Community Interest Company (CIC) which could help to facilitate future partnership and funding opportunities.

They have been invited by Birmingham's Public Health Team to join staff and volunteers undertaking the City's Drop and Collect Covid-19 service, which is working across the city to monitor and control the current outbreak. Their community links and language skills will be invaluable in communicating information.

Citizenship and Representation

Participation in transforming communities is evidence of an integrated and active citizenry, but people need representation and information before they can start to make change. Therefore, MiFC supports projects that deliver training in representation, advocacy, and legal rights.

Migrant Voice's newsroom members have been honing their community article writing skills with dedicated weekly sessions with Migrant Voice staff and with guest journalists. They have also been taking turns to guest edit and plan newsroom sessions.

Several members have written fresh articles for external news outlets in both English and native languages including Bangla, exploring themes relevant to migrants in the West Midlands and the UK.

Recent articles have touched on some issues affecting migrants around the Covid-19 lockdown but have also moved into spotlighting campaigns affecting undocumented migrants and asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds.



Newsroom Team Members

Black History Month planning for October 2020 is underway with members researching, curating, creating content for, and designing a special e-magazine to mark the national awareness month.

Excerpt from newsroom participant **Loraine Masiya Mponela's** article about the forthcoming e-magazine:



Migrant-led news team in West Midlands creating special magazine to showcase Black voices

As part of celebrations for this year's Black History Month (BHM 2020), a community migrant-led news team are creating an e-magazine to showcase the best of Black talent in the West Midlands.

The community journalists, trained by Migrant Voice as part of the MiFriendly Cities initiative, will be publishing the magazine online in October.

Morshed Akhtar, who is one of the producers of the e-magazine, said: "We are looking for content for this upcoming digital magazine to showcase Black voices, Black talent and Black experience." He added: "We formed the migrant-led news team to talk about immigrants in mainstream media, for a truthful representation".

Central England Law Centre - CELC

Promoting Citizenship - Presentation for Schools & Parents

From working on the MiFriendly Cities project, CELC has learnt how important legal literacy is, and how important it is to raise awareness of citizenship to migrant communities.

Elliot Randle, paralegal at CELC states, "People are often unaware of their immigration status, their rights, and how there are people like us offering our services to help them. Thus, many people go through their struggles alone. As a result, it has been crucial for us to go into schools and make our support accessible."

"We had to move away from offering our support face-to-face due to the pandemic, it is no longer possible for us to go into schools and raise awareness of the importance of citizenship. Therefore, we are creating a presentation which will be distributed to schools and MiFriendly Cities partners in Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton."



Schools can share our presentation with parents who could benefit from this advice. If any parents have any questions or would like additional support, then they can contact us."

enquiries@centralenglandlc.org.uk

News- Current and On the Horizon

Black History Month - October

MiFC is participating in Black History Month by sharing the stories of some of our project's participants, and encouraging others to #shareyourstory too.

You'll find their stories published on the [MiFC website](#)

We'd love you to read and share these stories so please follow and use these hashtags/handles:

#Shareyourstory

#BlackHistoryMonth

@BHMUK

#MiFriendly

Sounding Board - Our Legacy

At the end of June, **MigrationWork** held a final 'Sounding Board' round table discussion with partners, projects and cities from across Europe and the UK, on the topic of project 'legacy'.

We explored how projects like MiFC can deliver sustained impact, local policy changes, and an improved social context for migrants in our region. Among our 37 attendees, we heard from four expert speakers, representing Birmingham, Gdansk in Poland, and Antwerp in Belgium, and academics and practitioners from the West Midlands, Greece and Italy. You can access the report [here](#).

The MiFriendly Cities and Migrant Voice Black History Month e-magazine will be available online from week commencing the 5th of October on the [Migrant Voice website](#)

Stories matter

New Legacy Officer

We are extremely pleased to introduce our recently appointed Legacy Officer:

"Hi, my name is Ros Johnson and I am privileged to have been given the job of Legacy Co-ordinator for MiFriendly Cities.

My task is to make sure that we not only celebrate every achievement, but that we also continue as much of the good work that has been going on (and there is a lot of it) as possible.



'There is always a legacy – we want an exceptional one'

So, what is an exceptional legacy?

Well, I have some thoughts and would welcome your ideas and suggestions, but now I am thinking that it is sustainable, dynamic, well managed, effective, well supported, something to 'shout about', replicable, and lasting.

Not only that, but we want to be a beacon of good practice so that others in different places can copy what we have done in their own Cities and get some great results too.

I am working with the 3 cities, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton, and the other 8 partner organisations, and hope to meet as many individual projects and participants as time and Covid-19 will allow. Please do get in touch if you have something to share.

Ros Johnson - rosj@covrefugee.org.uk

Pop-Up Furniture Factory

Is to extend its services to Birmingham. The team are planning with Birmingham City Council to makeover accommodation and donate upcycled furniture to vulnerable people supported to access independent housing.

It's Our Right

We are happy to announce the launch of the "It's Our Right" website. The social innovation project employs art to help explain human, women's, children's and LGBT rights to local refugee, migrant and non-migrant communities. To explore their beautiful and informative artwork, please visit the [It's Our Right](#) website.

CELC & Birmingham City Council team up for 'Pathways to Citizenship' Webinar

In order to improve outreach in Birmingham, Central England Law Centre are making plans with Birmingham City Council. They are organising an online training session entitled 'Pathways to Citizenship for Young People'. Its due to be held on October 15th, 3:00pm-4:30pm.

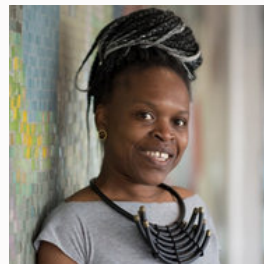
Teachers, pastoral school staff, child social workers and third sector organisations in Birmingham will all be invited to attend this important and informative presentation, and CELC will be hosting a Q&A session after.



MiFriendly Cities Art Exhibition

MiFriendly Cities is thrilled to announce that **Maokwo** will be curating our Art Exhibition. **Maokwo** is a migrant led arts collective.

The CEO, founder, artistic and creative director of **Maokwo** is Laura Nyahuye and she is delighted to be curating this exhibition. A previous participant of MiFC projects, Laura will bring her unique artistry, enthusiasm and activism to the project.



"our hands are made to make, to create, to touch lives, to heal & to heal others... what are made to make, to create, to touch lives, to heal & to heal others... what do you have in your hands?"
Laura Nyahuye

Kicking off with a series of creative workshops in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, participants will be supported to express what the cities mean to them. We are hoping for an exciting, thought provoking, accessible exhibition that encapsulates what MiFriendly Cities is about.

MiFriendly Cities is a Finalist in The Innovation in Politics Awards 2020!

We are very excited to inform you that MiFriendly Cities has been chosen as a finalist in The Innovation in Politics Awards 2020!

1058 jurors from 47 countries have selected our project as an outstanding example of political innovation in Europe. Out of 398 entries, MiFC Cities ranks among the 10 best in its field, and among the 90 best in Europe. There are nine categories and we are a finalist in the 'Human Rights' category.

The Winners will be announced in November, so let's hope we have more cause for celebration!

Bye for Now

That's all for now, we hope that we have given you a vivid tableau of MiFriendly Cities life, and you have enjoyed reading this newsletter.

So, look out for our future events, and please join in, meanwhile take care and stay safe.