

New Beginnings Project & COVID Champions Project

July 2021 - Issue 4

Activities of April, May and June 2021

EDITORIAL TEAM

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Blackburn YMCA works with the **asylum and refugee community** in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council. Our aim is: *Integration through Empowerment*.

COVID-19 AND THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY

The coronavirus pandemic is a challenge for everyone, but without targeted support and help the refugee community may suffer disproportionately. Throughout the pandemic wave, we have adapted our provision, and supported the refugee community in many ways.

According to Blackburn Council, step 4 of the Roadmap has been delayed until 19 July 2021. This means Step 3 restrictions continue to apply in Blackburn with Darwen and England with some exceptions around weddings and funerals. More details are available at: <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/coronavirus/4-step-roadmap-and-guidance>.

We have been trying to ensure that the refugee community is informed, and we encourage them to comply with the government's instructions.

The government has published the 'COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021', setting out the roadmap out of the current lockdown for England. Details are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021>.

We encourage people to rely on the mainstream TV networks, as well as local radio stations such as Lancashire BBC Radio. Moreover, we encourage people to visit the Home Office, Blackburn Council and NHS websites for the latest information.

We mainly worked remotely, and regularly maintained contact with the community, via social media, phone calls, email and text messages.

The YMCA community champions have been keeping in contact with their community members to ensure that people are supported and informed, and no one feels isolated and alone.

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER: During the lockdown, community members looked after each other, especially elderly people, in different ways.

AYA'S FAMILY VISITED BLACKBURN ON 17 MAY

The family of murdered student Aya Hachem, a refugee young girl from Lebanon, paid a tearful tribute to her in Blackburn on 17 May – a year on from when she was gunned down in Blackburn. The detailed news can be found at:

<https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/19309089.aya-hachems-family-visit-blackburn-hold-vigil-year-killing/>

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S DRAWING EXHIBITION & CERTIFICATE DISTRIBUTION CEREMONY

Since December, YMCA has been organising drawing competitions of children and young people - from 5 to be 10 years old and 11 to be 15 years old. The theme was: My Home. A good number of children submitted their entries. Maria Karim and Nausheen Hashmi were the judges of those competitions.

RESULTS: The results of two competitions were announced during two Zoom sessions.

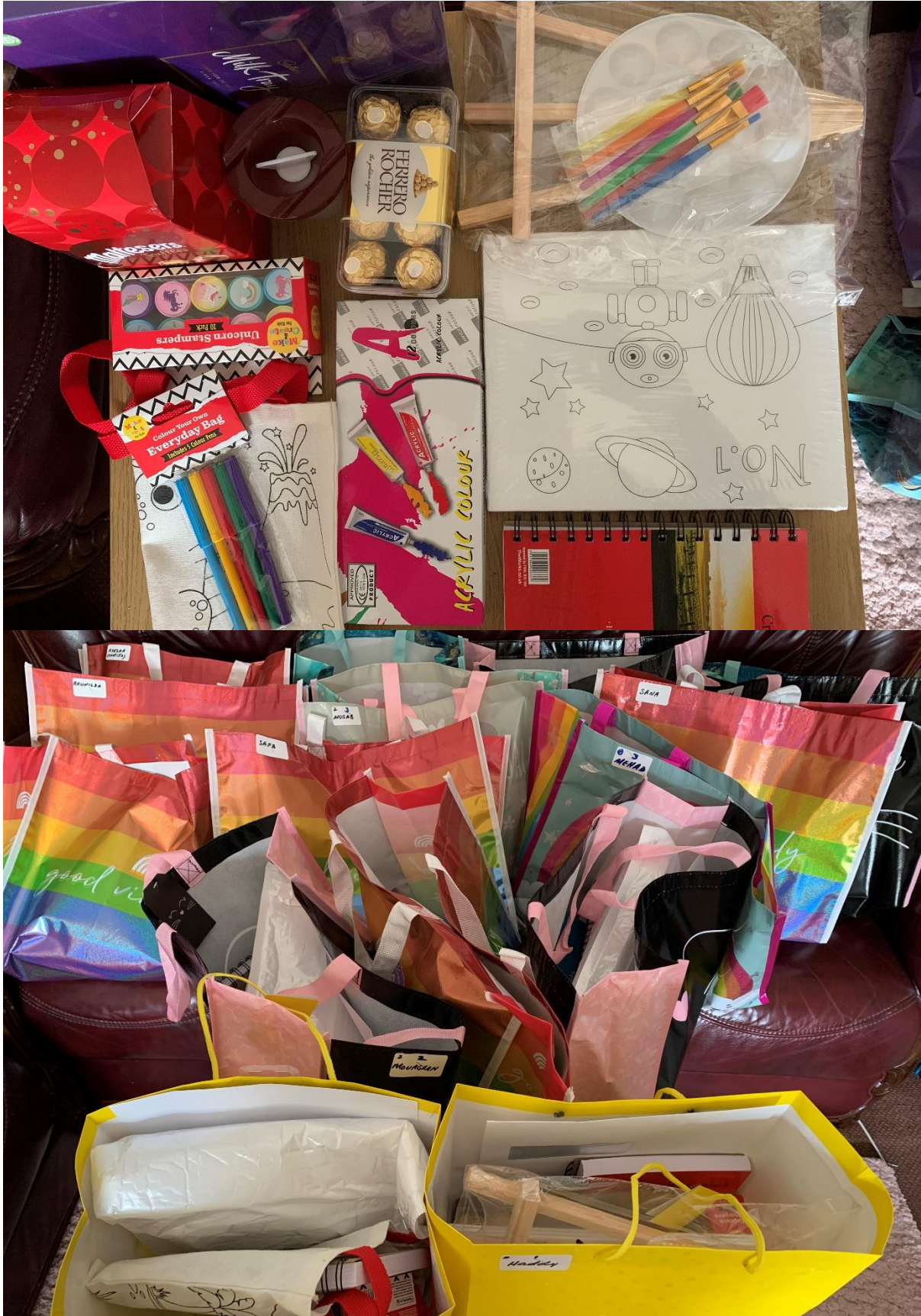
Winners of phase 1 - First prize: Awabodjie - Second prize: Jumanah - Third prize: Hamid

Winners of phase 2 - First prize: Haddy Badjee - Second prize: Mourgaan Alsager - Third prize: Musab Hamid



EXHIBITION: The Children's Drawing Exhibition was held from 12 June, at Blackburn Library and stayed until 28 June – during the REFUGEE WEEK and week after. Thanks to all the children who took part in the competitions, and special thanks to Blackburn Library, who provided us space for the exhibition.

CERTIFICATE & PRESENTS DISTRIBUTION CEREMONY: The certificate distribution ceremony was held on 19 June outside Town Hall Blackburn. All children got certificates and presents. Nausheen, one of the judges, and Chris Seddon presented the certificates.



COVID COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS PROJECT

YMCA

We are a



Covid
Community
Champions

Organisation

Blackburn YMCA is part of the Covid Community Champions project. It is a council's project run by six local organisations. The aim is to plan and deliver a collaborative and comprehensive programme of targeted engagement with Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, groups and individuals to build trust, communicate accurate health information, increase vaccination uptake and ultimately help to save lives. The champions will deliver and disseminate the key messages and information related to the public health messages, e.g. Covid-19, lockdown and restrictions, easing lockdown, PPE, government's road map, testing and vaccination. The project started in April and will end in September.

- The project coordinator and a lead champion have been attending the planning and network meetings.
- We have recruited 13 Covid Community Champions to run the project.
- Three of our volunteers are assisting the council with relevant translating material in other languages.

CORE GROUP AND CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS

We plan and deliver the project through a consultative process. Therefore, we regularly organise Core Group and Consultative meetings with the active community champions to plan the future activities.

Apart from other suggestions, many asked for youth activities through the youth club, and family trips outside Blackburn.

INFORMATION SHARING

Regularly, we disseminate information to the asylum and refugee community, which we receive from other organisations, on matters such as;

- Job opportunities
- Free trainings
- Social activities
- Educational opportunities
- Volunteering opportunities
- COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing
- Information from Blackburn Council, Home Office, an Public Health England
- Information about local activities and events



LOCKDOWN COMMUNITY HERO: DALJEET SACHDEVA, YMCA'S CHAMPION

We are pleased to share the news that one of YMCA's community champions has been declared Lockdown Community Hero by Blackburn College. She is doing level 2 English and Maths Functional Skills at the college. The headline of the story at Blackburn College's website says, "Blackburn College ESOL Learner Daljeet is a Lockdown Community Hero." Congratulations to Daljeet. The story can be found at: <https://www.blackburn.ac.uk/posts/2021/april/blackburn-college-esol-learner-daljeet-is-lockdown-community-hero/>.



JOB SUPPORT GROUP

The Job Support Group is still active. There are three volunteers (all work as professionals) who are part of the group, and are open to assist people in CV writing, job search and searching for volunteering work.

HOME GARDENING

Since April, YMCA has been running the Home Gardening project. We have provided seeds of different plants, small pots for seedlings, bags for packaging and multi-purpose composite to 20 families in Blackburn and Darwen. The gardening stuff was delivered at their doorstep. Two workshops were organised where an expert, Faye, provided information about how to grow plants at home – inside and outside.



Ahlan



Hanan



Essa



Nausheen



Kumba



Fozia



Ovevemi

REFUGEE WEEK



This year the refugee week was celebrated from 14 June to 20 June.

LANCASHIRE COUNCIL'S FLYER: LCC published a flyer of the refugee week activities. YMCA's activities were added from Blackburn.

REFUGEE WEEK PARTY: The refugee week party was on 20 June. The facilitator of the event was Salma Mohammed. A couple of people shared about their cultures, including Daljeet Sachdeva from Afghanistan, Eissa Malik from Myanmar, Modupe Olufunke Ainenehi from Nigeria, Naseraldeen Abdulaziz Ibrahim from Sudan, Nausheen Hashmi from Pakistan, Twana Mohammed Ibrahim from Kurdistan, Tinta Ali from Ivory Coast, and Madhubala shared about India culture. Chris Seddon said the words of thanks.

SUNDAY SERVICE: URC church celebrated the Sunday service on the refugee week's theme on 20 June. The YMCA's Project Coordinator did the readings during the service.

PARTNERS' ACTIVITIES. YMCA's Project Coordinator and some refugee community members attended a couple of online events, which were organised by partners or other organisations, including National Coordinators of the Refugee Week and Welcome Churches.

INTERFAITH EVENT

An online interfaith event was organised by AC on 23 May. One of YMCA's young champions, Daljeet was one of the guest speakers at the event.

NETWORKING AND PARTNERS' MEETINGS

The staff of YMCA attended a couple of networking and partners' meetings and sessions online. We work in partnership, and collaborate with other organisations and agencies. Blackburn YMCA is part of quite a few networks/forums in and outside Blackburn Borough.

For the last few months, we have been actively engaged into the two national campaigns:

LIFT THE BAN: This network has been campaigning for the right to work for asylum seekers. The national coalition conference was held in April where the progress of the campaign was shared.

PROPOSED NEW IMMIGRATION LAWS: The government has introduced the new immigration laws. The civil society has strong reservations on these changes. Therefore, through a consultative process, the civil society organisations prepared their own recommendations, which had been presented to the relevant policy making forums.

ONE TO ONE SUPPORT

Due to COVID-19, we changed our working practice to help people in their different needs. We provide assistance to the community via social media, including email and WhatsApp, or over the phone. We only have one-to-one meetings if it is essential. However, we made sure that everyone strictly adhered to government guidelines and standard operating procedures, regarding social distancing, PPE and contact with others.

We provided support and assistance to the community on the following issues:

- Reference letters for jobs, university admissions and immigration cases.
- Information on immigration issues.
- Signposted to other resources and agencies.

ONLINE EVENTS AND MEETINGS

Since people could not organise or attend events physically, we have provided information of online meetings, training workshops, and events, which various organisations arranged. Some people attended these events.

TRAININGS

A number of people attended various trainings, which were organised by other organisations.

COMMUNITY AND YOUTH AMBASSADORS: We have recruited two people for the Community Ambassadors programme and five children and young people for Youth Ambassadors programme.

COMMUNITY PICNICS



YMCA organised two community picnics on 29 May and 6 June at Witton Park and Corporation Park. These were the first outdoor events after 12 months of lockdown due to Covid.

A couple of families and individuals attended these events.

YMCA COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS MEETINGS

We have 30 male and female Community Champions, from 18 different nationalities and four faith groups: Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and Sikh.

It is very encouraging that despite the problems of equipment, digital knowledge, and internet data issues, a good number of people turn up for each meeting.

DATE	TOPIC	SPEAKER	PARTICIPANTS
24 April	Home Gardening	Faye Thornton	23
15 May	Community safety, Syed Naqui, Community Safety Team, BB Council		12
13 June	Covid testing and vaccination, Tinta Ali and Chris Seddon		12

WOMEN MEETING

ONLINE WOMEN MEETING

DATE: Friday, 9 April 2021

TIME: 11 am to 12 noon

VENUE: On Zoom

THEME: TB services

GUEST SPEAKER: Gibbons Melissa, TB Specialist Nurse, NHS Trust

Women's group meeting was held on 9 April where Gibbons Melissa spoke about TB service.

ASPEN

CARD

TRANSITION

As some people seeking asylum went into a third week without any funds following the botched contract transition of the pre-paid ASPEN card, over 50 refugee supporting organisations from across the UK wrote to the Home Secretary calling on her to '*publicly acknowledge the full extent of the crisis*'. In Glasgow Positive Action in Housing documented the experience of trying to support people in the city through this period whilst advocates at

We will continue to work with partners to make representations to the Home Office - both on the continuing problems around the ASPEN card, and to ensure that lessons are learned from this debacle and the same mistakes are not repeated in future.

NEW

PLAN

FOR

IMMIGRATION

Judicial Review proceedings have been issued against the UK Government on behalf of five claimants who have ongoing asylum claims and stand to be affected by the Home Office's New Plan for Immigration. The claimants contend that the way the consultation on the Plan was carried out indirectly discriminated against them; that it was in breach of the public sector equality duty and breached the common law requirements for a lawful consultation.

Asylum Matters – 23 June

A FEW FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- COVID Champions Outdoor Meeting
- Home Gardening Workshop
- Covid Champions Network Meeting
- Certificate distribution ceremony of Home Gardening Group
- YMCA Community Champions' Day Trip