

APRIL 2020 UPDATES

ADAPTING TO COVID-19

CHANGING CLIMATE

During the current outbreak of COVID-19, we continue to support our clients remotely. We have made some difficult and carefully considered decisions in order that the services we offer refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants groups can continue operating for as long as possible in this time of uncertainty. Some of the factors involved in our decision-making have included reduced staff & volunteer's numbers, reduced services, as well as prioritizing and making changes to existing delivery of services.

THE DESTITUTE PROJECT

The destitution project is in greater demand now than ever before as a result of the lock down and vulnerable people self isolating on health grounds. We are prioritising this project and have applied for various crisis funding to support the delivery of this project. We have also redirected some of our current resources and created an online appeal to support this worthy cause.

We are temporarily adjusting our office space to store food and other essential items in order to pack and distribute to meet the needs of our client group. We are in desperate need of more hands to support this project. This will involve a lot of coordinating and planning new processes among other things. We will take on casual staff and volunteers to help deliver this service.

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CONTACT WITH FUNDERS

We are applying for various Covid-19 emergency funds to help us reach as many vulnerable people within our client group. We are grateful to all our funders who have continued to support the various services of MRSN by allowing us to use and/or redirect funding for other essential activities in these challenging times to be able to support our communities and ensure liquidity. Our commitment to you will be to report back to you via this monthly newsletter in order to keep you informed on developments, progress and impact.



MRSN MOVES ONLINE

In order to support our client group and prepare for the future we are making further developments to our website so that it can be used to better reflect the work of MRSN and its brand. We have now created a COVID-19 hub to support our client groups and partners. This includes information and resources in multiple languages, details of organisations still running and what services they offer. We plan to develop the website in order that it can be used as a training tool for volunteers and a multi lingual hub of resources for our client groups. In the coming weeks, we will have developed our social media platforms in order to better disseminate information to our supporters, funders and client groups. We will also invest more into online fundraising platforms in order that we can raise more money and engagement within our network of supporters.



GENERAL ENQUIRIES

In order to keep utilising our office phone, we have set up a voicemail system that directs messages to our emails.

Therefore for all general queries, callers can leave an answerphone message on our mainline number which will be followed up as soon as practical. Where calls are of a more urgent nature, our voicemail directs people to call the duty advisor via a direct line.

We are also handling lots of request via a dedicated WhatsApp number.



SELF HELP GUIDES AND VIDEOS

Changes to our services during COVID-19 outbreak has led us to take different approaches to the way we deliver some of our services. Many people are asking about applying for Travel Documents, however due to travel restriction we are not prioritising support in this area. Instead we have produced simple 'how to' guides available on our website in English, Farsi and Arabic. We will continue to produce guides on more straightforward application procedures.

We will also be creating videos guides which will walk clients through completing application forms. These will then be uploaded on to our youtube channel. Once we have made these videos in english, we can then work with our volunteers to create videos in other languages.

PARTNERSHIPS AND STAFF WELLBEING

We are working more closely with our partners during this difficult time. MRSN meets fortnightly with other partner agencies via video conferencing to share best practice, concerns, provide updates, and offer support to one another. MRSN also hold weekly video conference meetings with our internal team and contact is still maintained almost daily with both internal and external colleague's.

MRSN | 129 Princess Road | Moss Side | Manchester | M14 4RB | Registered charity number: 1109990



@MRSNManchester



@MRSNManchester



info@mrsn.org.uk



0161 868 0777

EMPLOYMENT COURSE

We are currently unable to start the Computer Skills for Work course as planned. Consideration was given to hosting the classes on video conferencing apps, but this ended up proving too costly and complicated.

Instead, we have temporarily changed the project into an Employment Support Helpline, designed to individually support refugee clients (particularly those claiming Universal Credit) with the sort of digital employment issues.

We recently supported a client in applying for three separate temporary jobs online with Tesco. Other people have received assistance applying for universal credit which initially was met with some obstacles in order to progress claims. However, the DWP have now resolved this issue. Alongside this we are developing a pool/bank of "work ready" individuals fully prepared with CV's and certificates in anticipation of jobs becoming available during this and post this corona virus period.

SHARED ROUTES

Due to the nature of this Peer Navigator Programme, we are unable to deliver this service following the guidelines set out by the government. However, we are in discussion with Big Lottery funding on how we proceed.



REFUGEE INTEGRATION SERVICE

During the national lock down we are getting a rise in calls from new refugees relocating to Manchester which is posing very difficult given the restrictions on movement. Letting agents have closed, landlords in the rental sector with others proving supported housing are not taking on new tenants in shared properties. As a result new refugees are finding themselves homeless. We know some are being put up by friends who are risking their own tenancy agreements by doing this as well as placing other housemates at potential risk by not adhering to imposed movement restrictions to slow the spread of coronavirus.

By way of response we are providing regular telephone welfare checks, coronavirus prevention reminders about hand sanitising, social isolation, symptoms and who to contact. Many of these households do not have TV's or radios therefore we are considering purchasing small radio's for households so they can listen to news updates as oppose to relying on internet news or occassional misinformation from friends. Existing and new clients are accessing our destitute provisions and are continuing to receive ongoing case work support.

CHECK IN AND CHAT VOLUNTEER SERVICE

We are currently in the process of implementing a volunteer Coronavirus Telephone Buddy Service. Our existing volunteers (as well as recruiting new ones) will be required to provide short term telephone support to Refugees, Asylum Seekers and other vulnerable migrant groups at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation. We are also offering individual and group English Conversation session via video conferencing platforms. This is in response to clients wishing to prevent loneliness occurring as a result of social-isolation.

This will be up and running very soon and we will be happy to provide further details on this in our next newsletter.

