



[www.sass.wales](http://www.sass.wales)

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## Update June 2022

Comments by several asylum seekers, June 2022:

"Because of the things that we have gone through, we can lose our way. We lose ourselves. Coming to SASS helps us to start getting back on the right way."

"We have bad thoughts, we are afraid, we worry. When I come here (Friday drop-in) it is healing. When I go back to my house on Friday nights, I can sleep."

"I had left everything. I have no family, no home, no friends. When I come here you are all my friends."

"I was very quiet to start with, then I opened up and gained confidence. Now I am able to open up to new arrivals."

## Highlights – 2022 so far

### Drop-ins are back

Drop-ins were sorely missed by all -- asylum seekers, refugees and local volunteers. The one comment most often heard at doorstep visits, in telephone chats, on text messages was that they missed the drop-ins and the comment was always followed by the same question: "When can the drop-ins start again?"

Friday evenings at St. James' Parish Centre restarted on 25<sup>th</sup> February with a series of four planning, information and feedback sessions.

**From Friday 1<sup>st</sup> April, 4.00-7.00 full drop-in sessions restarted.**

### The evening includes:

4.00-5.00 ESOL (English language) teaching groups

5.00 – 7.00 Open session for socialising and food. Table tennis, children's activities, sharing table.

5.30-6.30 FAN group

6.00 p.m. (approx.) Sharing food

7.00 Finish

Short training courses are in the planning stage on topics such as safeguarding, signposting, Right to Remain, food hygiene, first aid, sewing, cooking.

Between 12 and 20 attend the **Saturday group** which is currently meeting in the Multicultural hub of the Grand Theatre. It will soon move to York Place Baptist Church which is a larger venue and will enable food to be prepared and served.

## **Friday Attendances**

About 30 people attended each of the four planning sessions at St. James. Total of 124 attended over four weeks.

Since April, attendances have ranged from 40-45 during Ramadan to 73 in late June. The message is getting out that we are open again. Those attending have 16-21 different mother tongues. We know that the cost of bus fares for families who live a considerable distance from either the Uplands or the City Centre is a barrier to attending drop-ins. We are seeking ways to ameliorate these barriers.

Many of those attending now have arrived in Swansea since 2020. There are quite a few babies and small children who come with their parent/s. They bring joy and noise, happiness and, sometimes anxiety as they crawl across the floor getting close to the table tennis players! The number of students in the ESOL groups is also growing week by week. On the last Friday in June, 26 learners came to the groups.

The Friday evening FAN group is also very popular with 20-25 asylum seekers, refugees and members of the local community attending each week.

Sharing food, is always a vital part of the drop-in. An experienced and committed kitchen team prepare and cook on a Friday evening. The aroma when the food is about to be served is delicious and the taste is even better

Since restarting and the substantial increase in the cost of food, it's necessary to prepare additional food. Those extra portions are transferred into cardboard take away boxes so that attendees can take an extra meal home with them. Just like individual food bills, the cost of supplying food for drop-ins has increased.

## **Volunteer Development Workers**

Since Wayne Yare retired in 2021, SASS has employed two part-time paid volunteer development workers. Kelly Wearing has worked four days per week and George Wilson three days. Kelly retired from her post in May 2022 for health reasons. We are grateful for her hard work and commitment to SASS and, especially, to individual asylum seekers and refugees over the past 18 months. Kelly will continue to be a SASS volunteer. George has agreed to increase his working week to four days.

A new paid worker was appointed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June to work three days per week. We welcome Sherifat Aidonesi Abubakar to the SASS family.

## **Toiletries, household items, clothes, toys, books, art and craft materials**

Poverty is a core problem for asylum seekers. The weekly allowance for an asylum seeker is just short of £40; they are not entitled to any benefits nor allowed to work.

Basics like shoes, jackets, blankets, toys are unaffordable. Toiletries and even sanitary products are a luxury. Poverty is compounded by language barriers, cultural unfamiliarity, anxiety and trauma (the result of experiences in no-longer-home countries, and sadly, also often the result of experiences in the UK), and for many, physical isolation: accommodation can be 5 miles walk from the city centre and good value shops.

We try to continue to provide some of these necessities. We are limited in what and how much we can do because we don't have storage space. We are working with Unity in Diversity and Sketty Uniting Church who have a clothes store that also includes household goods.

We continue to provide toiletries, sanitary products and other small items available at the drop-ins. We are grateful to Parkmill WI and other group and individual donors who help to supply these needs. However, we are fully aware that there is unmet need.

## **Hafan Books**

has recently produced a film called No Friends but the Mountains with Kurdish refugees by Shahsavar Rahmani (words) Lucy Donald (artwork) and Tom Cheesman. You can see it at HafanBooks.org together with the multilingual children's audio-animation library: More Stories from Swansea.

Three new titles have also been published: Second Home, Afromantic and The Songs of a Wolf. See details on the website: [www.hafanbooks.org](http://www.hafanbooks.org).

## **Finance**

Now that the drop-ins are active again, the food and venue hire costs have returned and increased. Overall, SASS costs **about £75,000-£80,000 a year** to run.

About a third of SASS annual spend is on the salaries of the volunteer development officers and a fee-paid bookkeeper. We have recently rented a small office space for the workers where a meeting space is also available.

About a quarter of the annual costs come from private donors, the rest from various grants. Preparing grant applications is time-consuming. Sherry Coates has recently agreed to act as a financial advisor to SASS Trustees. Her expertise is proving invaluable in outlining both our current position and predictions for future needs.

If you could help with a regular or a one-off donation, it would be much appreciated. Contact the Treasurer, Tom Cheesman ([t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk)) (07736 408064).

## The Future

We have lots of ideas and plans for the future. Some of them are listed below.

### Volunteer Training

High on the list of priorities is providing more opportunities for our asylum seeker and refugee community to actively volunteer with SASS, to gain confidence and experience which they share and use to lead future training groups.

Short training courses in signposting, safeguarding, asylum process, right to remain are planned. We hope to give opportunities and encourage volunteers to gain food hygiene certificates, playworker and first aid certificates, skills for employment.

### Activity Groups

We plan to organise more activity groups such as a sewing group, cookery group, art/crafts, sport, maybe DIY and even gardening. We are exploring more partnership/collaborative working with other organisations such as the Dylan Thomas Centre (children and family art activities) and EYST (sports).

### Learning English

Informal English classes have always been very popular at drop ins, as preparation or reinforcement (or sometimes as a substitute) for formal College classes. It is apparent this tuition is needed now more than ever. On average 15-20 participate in English classes at the Friday drop-in and 12-15 on Saturdays.

Groups meet both in person and on Zoom and we hope to be able to continue providing both. Women particularly find zoom groups attractive because they can learn at home with their children sleeping or playing beside them.

In addition to the groups that meet at the drop-ins on Friday and Saturday, there are groups that meet at other times in the week on zoom. Lessons are available at all levels, with no rules about attendance.

### Volunteers

All of these plans and ideas need willing volunteers to help make them happen. Currently we have about 50 active volunteers and we need more.

#### **Situations Vacant: current urgent need for volunteers as:**

- Drivers to deliver donations to asylum seekers and refugees throughout Swansea;
- Drivers who would collect a family or a couple of individuals to bring them to the drop-in on a Friday and take them home at 7.00;
- Kitchen helpers for shopping, helping to prepare, serve and clear up after the meal;
- ESOL/English language teachers;
- FAN group facilitators;
- Children's activity helpers;
- Befrienders

- Whatever you want to help with, get involved with, give your time for, share your skills and talents.

All roles are important, it's quite easy really. Everyone can give a warm welcoming smile, listen, chat, be part of Swansea as a welcoming City of Sanctuary.

You are always welcome to visit our drop-in sessions. Be warned though that you may be given a job when you come!

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Tom Cheesman ([t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:t.cheesman@swansea.ac.uk) 07736 408064), Sandra Morton ([simorton48@gmail.com](mailto:simorton48@gmail.com) 07400 605669) or [vol.sbassg@gmail.com](mailto:vol.sbassg@gmail.com) 07853 717017.

You can also find out more by visiting the SASS facebook page, the blog and the website: [www.sass.wales](http://www.sass.wales).

## Impact

During the planning meetings held in March before the full Friday drop-in restarted, we used small discussion groups to consider the following questions. Here are some of their responses:

### ***What are the words that best describe SASS?***

- community, safe, welcoming, supportive, respect, therapeutic
- friendly, accepting, helpful, supportive, socialise, vibrant
- practical, friendly, inclusive

### ***Is SASS needed in Swansea? How do you know/how can you tell?***

- The numbers who come to drop ins, English lessons and other activities speak for themselves. So do the numbers using other SASS support like phone top ups, donations of toys, clothes and household items.
- In December 2021, Christmas gifts were provided for about 400 children, adults and families.
- Lots of people were constantly asking during covid when we can start and get together again.
- It is an important place for telling people about activities, services and support provided by other organisations, like free buses for example.
- Drop-ins function as a first point of contact for many with local people.
- Asylum seekers stay at home. They are not allowed to work. It is not easy to engage. People feel useless; they feel they have no value. SASS helps break down that isolation.
- SASS provides life-changing volunteering opportunities-the chance to become engaged and develop self-worth. SASS provides that first opportunity for engagement. This help is not economic reward but has huge value.
- It provides means of people making connections within the community and with others from different countries.

**What are the most important things about SASS?**

- Being together. I was sad when alone.
- To speak to others and help where we can.
- It's friendly and informal. The food is good.
- It provides places and times to socialise, to talk to others who speak your mother tongue.
- Gives a chance to meet new people from Swansea and from lots of other places.
- Everyone will help with everything, setting up tables, clearing up, making food, talking to new people. We are a team.
- It encourages people to volunteer and do lots of different things, so we can be involved and help.
- Gives children a chance to work and play together, especially in holiday times.

Despite all the uncertainties and challenges of the past two years, SASS's core values of friendship and mutual support have not been damaged. We continue to find ways of making Swansea a welcoming place for asylum seekers.

**Thank you to everyone who supports us in all your varied ways!**

**... on behalf of all the trustees, volunteers and members of SASS**

**AND ALSO CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT:**

we are very grateful for current **grant funding** from:

Allen Lane Foundation

Austin Bailey Foundation

City and County of Swansea

Lloyds Bank Foundation

Open University

Swansea City of Sanctuary

Swansea Council of Voluntary Services

Ty Croeso

Welsh Government

"On a Friday a year ago, I sat on a train to Swansea. Loads of people singing at each other, on the way to the 6 nations rugby. I went to the Glynn Vivian gallery cafe (as is tradition when I'm in Swansea) to work on a funding application. Then I went to this amazing community drop-in. The community hall was full of people - people helping each other, caring for each other, surviving. That spirit has continued but I miss people and community. I've thought about that evening so often during this terrible year."

Lisa Matthews, from the charity **Right to Remain**, on Facebook on 12 March 2021