



Our Response To Covid-19

October 2020

Background

Central and West Integration Network is a charity and a voluntary network of groups and individuals, established in 2009. We aim to support asylum seekers and refugees, migrant workers and black and minority ethnic people, and work with all communities to promote integration, in the City Centre and West End of Glasgow, across the city and beyond. Many of our activities take place in the Garnethill Multicultural Community Centre, others in Townhead Village Hall, Whiteinch Neighbourhood Centre and other venues.

Our work before March 2020 typically included:

- A food bank service on Fridays with had a core aim of supporting refugees and asylum seekers who are destitute or have very low incomes, but also met other pressing needs
- A community meal and drop in service, at the same time and place as the food bank, open to its users but also to people from many local communities. More than 80



IWD 2020 - last event before lockdown

people attended each week. Activities there included health information, a clothing shop, a knitting group, a creative writing class and others

- English classes, delivered with partners. Community learning classes in three centres. Activity programmes for children and young people. Women's groups.
- Distributing grants to refugees and asylum seekers on behalf of the Refugee Survival Trust
- Events to mark various occasions – Black History Month, International Women's Day, Burns Night, Christmas etc. - throughout the year as part of the weekly drop-in or elsewhere, with entertainment, arts and crafts activities, food, speakers etc.,
- Training community members to carry out research on food and health. An allotment run by community volunteers
- Network meetings, with presentations from invited guests, discussions by members and information sharing.

Funding was received especially from:

- Glasgow City Council for our core activities and the school holiday programme
- Scottish Government for the drop-in service and community meal
- Refugee Survival Trust for destitution grants
- NHS Health Scotland for the volunteer researchers' project.

Our response to the pandemic

Almost all of these activities became impossible in their existing form during the lockdown required by the Covid-19 pandemic; most, involving as they do bringing large groups together in community centres, remain impossible at the time of writing. But the needs of our community members remained and grew – lack of access to food and other basic requirements, including understandable and relevant information on health and other needs, and greater isolation of people already suffering from it, were obvious examples. We know and have tried to support where possible some of the people affected by the controversial housing of some asylum seekers in hotels during the epidemic. But many others were struggling, both in the City Centre and West End and amongst those elsewhere who have always accessed our city centre activities.

Food In response to the crisis we suspended our community meal and all other face to face group activities. Staff and many volunteers still worked to support people who were affected both by the lockdown and by difficulties arising from their migration status. The food bank continued to run, after we revised our operations to allow for adequate social distancing. Initially this was across the centre doorstep, but we rapidly moved to a system in which almost all of the food is delivered to homes by volunteer drivers. We now actively encourage people not to come to the centre unless they live close by.



New people were referred to the service by partners, and the numbers supported each week have reached around 100, with the need showing no sign of diminishing. Supermarkets and others have made large donations of food. In spite of distributing over a ton of food a week, there have

been opportunities to donate surpluses to another food bank and to the Marie Trust. The Garnethill Multicultural Centre must be thanked for opening to allow the food service to continue when their other activities were suspended.

The food 'parcels' include fruit and vegetables, meat, flour, rice etc. as well as packaged food. Households with three or more people receive a larger 'parcel (around 20 kg); both halal and non-halal options are offered. Other necessities are also distributed.

An expert analysis of the nutritional value of the food parcels recently found that they met and exceeded energy requirements for both men and women and would last an additional three days for a woman and an additional two days for a man. The amount of nutrients and vitamins were generally good, with some concern over high sugar content, which we aim to address.

Additional funds were obtained via Glasgow City Council during the peak months of lockdown for the purchase of supermarket vouchers for some community members, to help them source their food locally and as safely as possible. Many of these vouchers were delivered to people's phones.

Maintaining contact and activities Refugee Survival Trust destitution grants were still provided, largely without direct use of cash, to a smaller number of people but in larger amounts, due to Red Cross support.

We began phoning, or consulting via WhatsApp and later Zoom, with service users to ask about and share information that would be useful to others who are surviving on a low income or in destitution under lockdown conditions. This has become an organised Survival Skills Project, with regular Identification of needs and priorities within the community. Contacts have been shared for organisations offering phone top ups, clothes donations, entertainment packs and offers of online activity. Age-relevant family activity packs have been distributed alongside food deliveries. We now have a small team of 'remote support volunteers' who have helped, for example, with access to bicycles and computers. From September they have become paid sessional workers, thanks to support from the Corra Foundation.

We have also developed 'remote drop-in' sessions on Zoom to help replace our previous Friday sessions. These offered short, well-planned activities, including amongst other things: craft projects, with materials delivered in advance; fun activities about sites of interest in Glasgow, pictures of the world etc.; mindfulness, mediation and breathing exercises; and informal chatting and sharing.

A youth summer holiday programme was delivered remotely, with activity packs delivered each week to 80 children, an increased number on previous programmes. At the time of writing an October programme was imminent.

Our creative writing group continued its work on Facebook. One volunteer is setting up a Spanish speaking Zoom group - we decided that at this time a chance to speak one's own language in remote meetings can help to counteract loneliness and isolation. CWIN's Allotment garden has been kept going



through the pandemic with the support of volunteers working safely. Our Townhead group has been revived in online form this autumn.

Our organisation During this period we received confirmation of renewed funding from our two biggest funders, Glasgow City Council and Scottish Government. Additional special Covid related funding was obtained from both of them and from Foundation Scotland. We also successfully trialled an appeal for online donations, initially to meet a specific individual need that had been identified.

Staff have mostly been kept very busy (one part-timer had to be furloughed until the autumn), and several of our regular sessional workers as well as many volunteers have helped with activities. A volunteers' Zoom group has been active

Staff have continued to play active roles in Nourish Scotland's Dignity in Practice network, the Glasgow Asylum Seekers' Destitution Network and the Integration Networks Forum.

Our Executive has met regularly via Zoom, and with our AGM in October we hope to restart meetings for our wider network, using the same medium.

As the situation continues to develop we keep seeking new safe ways to offer support and involvement to people. We hope to offer English classes online in partnership with Glasgow Clyde College. Volunteer tutors from Glasgow ESOL Forum have already been working remotely with some of our learners and we hope that their ESOL classes can resume. Outdoor activities such as family activities in parks and some face to face activity, where possible within the guidelines, may become possible.

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