



## MEP NEWSLETTER – MAY 2023

Welcome to the MEP newsletter – a place for everyone to share news and information.

### LITTLE AMAL VISITS BRIGHTON



At the end of March a special visitor came to Brighton beach. Her name is Little Amal, a giant puppet who represents a nine-year-old Syrian refugee. She started her journey on the Syrian border in 2012, and since then has travelled right across Europe, with the aim of raising awareness about people who have been forced to leave their homes and families. The name *Amal* means "hope" in Arabic.

When Amal came to Brighton she met some refugees in the afternoon, and then in the early evening she walked along the beach from the West Pier to the Palace Pier. About 1,000 people came out to meet her, including many students and teachers from MEP. Everyone was happy to see her. It was a very special experience, to look into her eyes and walk beside her. The connection between the puppet and the people watching was amazing and moving.

Thanks to Paul G for the great photo of Amal.

Some of our MEP students (and their children) wrote about what happened when they met Amal.

Here is what **Maryum**, the 11-year-old daughter of MEP student Huda, wrote: *We went to the beach to see Amal, the giant puppet. She came from Syria like us, but she walked. She lived in a camp with her mum. One day, during the war, her mum went out to the shops and never came back. Amal wants to find her mum. Her face is happy and sad. She is really tall and she wears enormous boots. Her hair is long and brown. She came to remind people not to forget refugees, and to look after them.*

**Monica**, our student from El Salvador, wrote: *I think it is very important that we all become aware of how people who emigrate from our countries live, and seek to have a home in another country. The process of adapting to a different language, customs, way of life, etc. is very difficult and Amal is the voice of all of us.*

And Monica's son **René**, age 9, wrote: *It's very nice that Amal represents all the migrant children!*



Douaa with Amal



## ALLOTMENT NEWS

(Allotment means Vegetable Garden)

Spring is here at

last and it's a busy time at the allotment. Volunteer Will has been busy getting ready for a new growing season. This year we have already planted strawberries, potatoes, courgettes and beans with plenty more to come in the summer.

Would you like to get involved? The allotment is a beautiful relaxing space, surrounded by greenery and filled with the sounds of nature. There's lots to do and vegetables that you can take home. It would be lovely to see some new people there, both students and volunteers. **Everyone is welcome.** The allotment is near Hollingbury, close to Ditchling Road (postcode BN1 7HZ).



Will is at the allotment on Thursday afternoons if you would like to help regularly. He can arrange to meet people and let them into the allotment most days (with notice), to show anyone around, sow some new seeds and harvest any vegetables which are ready.



Or you could join for one of our open days over the summer. The next open day is on **17<sup>th</sup> June**. If you are interested in visiting, please contact Will by WhatsApp on 07965 756126, or speak to Susan in the Sewing Group.



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## DO YOU HAVE A HOUSING PROBLEM OR WORRY?

**LAWSTOP**

housing lawyers, can give you free advice at Exeter Street Hall.

**For an appointment, or for more information, ask Maude or Rob or any volunteer at MEP.**

## Summer Dates



Exeter Street Hall is closed on 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July, so there is no MEP on those days.

We will also be closed for part of August. Instead there will be some other events, including a picnic in Preston Park, a music event on 10<sup>th</sup> August, and an open day at the Allotment. More information to follow.



## EXETER STREET HALL

We meet each week at Exeter Street Hall, a welcoming airy space which is perfect for our MEP sessions. But how much do you know about the Hall?

The Hall was originally built in 1884, as a church hall, at a cost of £1,799 (that's over £180,000 today). It has always been a busy place, used by people of all ages for many activities. The church decided to sell the hall, and in 2013 over 900 people contributed money in order to buy it and save it for use by the local community.

MEP meets in the Hall every Monday, but when we are not there it is used for many other activities, including toddler groups, table tennis, a monthly repair café, yoga, pilates and ballet classes, and many more. It is also the scene for many social activities including quizzes, music events and food festivals.

In May 2023 volunteers at the Hall hosted a wonderful afternoon for Brighton's migrant community and people from the asylum seekers hotels. Over 150 guests came to enjoy a truly delicious meal and a performance by Syrian musicians. It was great to see so many people from different cultures mixing and enjoying themselves, along with lots of lively children, dancing, playing and joining in the body painting.



In 2023 Exeter Street Hall will celebrate 10 years of Community ownership. To mark the occasion, there will be several events in September.



The MEP Sewing Group will be helping out by making some decorations for the Hall – a new banner, and some bunting. **We need your help!** We are hoping that lots of people from MEP, teachers and students, and not just the Sewing Group, will join in with making some bunting. From mid-May onwards there will be a special table set up in the hall on Mondays, with a sewing machine and fabrics, and a Sewing Group teacher ready to get everyone involved. Let's all work together to help the hall celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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MEP invites students and volunteers to come to a **Music and Nature** event in beautiful Stanmer Park, on the edge of Brighton on Monday 24th July.

Join us for an **Interactive Listening Walk**, as we learn to tune in to the sounds around us and how they change as we move through different places. Will they be different at other times of year, or in the future? How do the sounds make us feel?



There are places for up to 20 people - and children are welcome. If you would like to come to the event, or for more details, please ask MEP volunteers Susan or Rob.

## MEP CELEBRATES THE NHS

On Sunday 2nd April and Sunday 14th May some MEP students and volunteers met at Exeter Street Hall to lend their enthusiasm and creativity to a local National Health Service (NHS) support project - **Threads of Survival** - which celebrates the NHS by making a quilt.

The Threads of Survival project is organising individuals and community groups to make squares which will then be sewn together into a quilt. The quilt will be part of an exhibition to celebrate the 75th birthday of the NHS at the beginning of July.

Our NHS and NHS workers have never needed our support more. The aim of this project is to raise awareness by producing a quilt with a range of messages in support of the NHS and showing concern about what is being done to it - for example, privatisation of many of the NHS services.

MEP students and volunteers made some very colourful squares with messages of support for the NHS. They also celebrated the huge contribution that migrants make to the NHS: approximately 12% of NHS staff are non-British nationals.



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## SEWING GROUP NEWS

This term we were busy as usual in the Sewing Group, making a range of lovely things. Our students included Halima, Maliha, Sherin, Rabab, Teresa and Israa, and we welcomed our new volunteer Barbara.



Our projects this term included bags, pillowcases, curtains and clothes. Halima altered several sets of curtains, and made a few new dresses. Our new student Maliha began with making a bag then moved on to making a skirt and top to wear. Israa made some very stylish clothes, including matching wool trousers and top, with decorative stitching, and a very bright pair of pyjama trousers!



We still have a waiting list of students, and are looking for new volunteers. We said goodbye in January to Susan Lodge, who was with us for a year and gave us lots of great ideas, including the very popular hand-sewn name badges. In the summer Eleanor will also be moving on – good luck for your new life in Barcelona!



*We hope you have enjoyed reading this newsletter. If you have ideas for future editions, or would like to write something, please contact Susan, at the Sewing Group.*