



## MEP NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2024

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

**Wishing a very Happy New Year to all MEP students and volunteers !**

### MEP'S 20<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION



For 20 years MEP has provided a safe and welcoming space for migrants. The MEP family has grown from small beginnings, with many new volunteers and students each year. Our range of activities has expanded and we are always happy to hear from anyone who has an idea for new projects.

We celebrated with a party in November at Exeter Street Hall. The party was a great occasion to have some fun and see not



only students and volunteers who are still part of MEP but also many who have moved on.



We all joined in with games and music, including laughter yoga, led by visiting entertainer Jools, singing and dancing.



We enjoyed a delicious buffet of international dishes, brought by students and volunteers.



Afterwards we listened to some lively music, and students showed us dances from their countries, a joyous end to the day.



## 2023 SUMMER EVENTS

During the 2023 summer break, we held a number of events for our students.



On Monday 24th July we once again joined with Bela and Bethan from Music for Connection, for a **Music and Nature** event in Stanmer Park, on the edge of Brighton.

We walked through the forest listening to all the sounds which we could hear around us. Then we all went to sit in the beautiful forest dome, formed from green willow trees. We sat in a circle and made music with drums, clapping and singing.



In August we met up again with Music for Connection, to take part in a music session at St Matthias Church. The children had a go at playing various instruments, including violins and even bagpipes. We also all joined in with some traditional dances.

Also in August, MEP once again organised a **picnic** for students and volunteers in Preston Park. Here's what **Helen**, one of the MEP volunteers, wrote about it: *It was time for the MEP annual summer picnic on Monday 21st August and the sun actually shone! Lots of people came, we sat under a tree, spread picnic rugs and shared amazing food with our lovely MEP family of students and volunteers. Paul G organised the free refreshments with great efficiency (a huge improvement on my efforts last year), Paul S entertained the children with face painting, hair colouring (don't ask), and bubble-blowing, Paolo entertained everyone anyway, Maude wore a lovely necklace, Cath wore a lovely yellow sunhat, and everyone had a great time. It was all thoroughly enjoyable and makes me think that if only more people could meet, share food and care for each other, the world would be a better place. Sue's chocolate cornflake cakes were awesome, too. I think it was Sue, apologies if I got that wrong, I was too busy eating and talking .....*



# EXETER STREET HALL

Our valuable connection with Exeter Street Hall continued in 2023.

In May the people at the Hall held a party for refugees and asylum seekers from across the city. Many of our MEP students were among those who enjoyed delicious food and warm hospitality. The event was such a success that they are planning another party this year, in March.

In September the Hall celebrated 10 years of being owned by the community. They held several events to mark the occasion. The Hall was decorated with 75 metres of bunting made by the MEP Sewing Group and other volunteers. Next time you are there, look up – the new green banner was also made by the MEP Sewing Group.



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## AGM, OCTOBER 2023

In October we held the MEP Annual General Meeting, which is a chance to look back over the past year, and plan for the year ahead. As an introduction Paolo gave a summary of how MEP is organised. He explained that it is a community project with an egalitarian structure. Everyone works as a group to provide teaching of English, cooking, a Sewing Group and a welcome desk. At the meeting a new committee was elected. Among the subjects discussed it was agreed that we should give all new students an Induction Leaflet, similar to the leaflet which new volunteers get, to explain how MEP works and to help students to feel more integrated.

Looking back over the last year, we talked about how MEP has grown, so that recently it has been nearly full in the mornings. Teaching priorities are clearer (low level English students or those with other difficult circumstances). One big change was that in the year more people came from the asylum hotels, up to around 50% of our students. The welcome team has grown, including more support people, some of whom are refugees and asylum seekers. We were also able to support the running of English lessons for new students at All Saints Church in Hove. Apart from English teaching, there is a successful Sewing Group and there are exciting plans for the allotment (which we are now calling the Community Garden). Outside our weekly sessions, there have been some larger events which were very well attended, such as the picnic, the music events, and the party run by Exeter Street Hall. We have built a connection with Lawstop, who offer legal support and who now come to MEP when required to help with housing issues. Teaching workshops have been held for teachers, and a mental health facilitator visited for a meeting. MEP continues to grow, and we are lucky to have so many committed volunteers and enthusiastic students.



# MEP COMMUNITY GARDEN: ANOTHER GROWING YEAR IS BEGINNING

Another growing season is now over, and it was another successful one! We would like to thank the many MEP students and volunteers for all their efforts and encouragement. We thought this newsletter would be a good time to think about what happened in 2023 and then look ahead to the 2024 growing season.

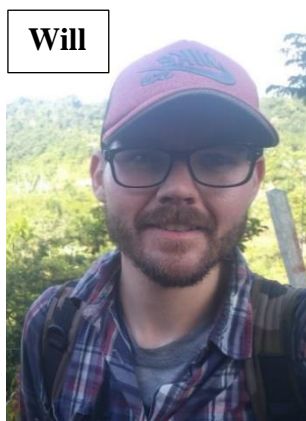
In 2023, we grew so many vegetables with your help, and many of us just went to visit the Community Garden to enjoy being outside in the fresh air. The plot feels like being in the countryside, but it is in Brighton and only a short walk from the bus stop on the Ditchling Road. The garden is near Fiveways Bus Stop: Osborne Road.



We hope that as the weather gets better in 2024 more of you will visit for the first time, and that others will keep coming back! Even if you are not in an English class in 2024 you are very welcome to come and enjoy the green space with us. If you want to just enjoy the scenery, have a cup of tea, or even do a small job, it is a wonderful space to spend time and so satisfying to see your effort help plants grow. I always feel better when I've been there, even for one hour! It is also a good chance to speak English and learn some new words.



If you would like to join us, come and see the space, or grow some vegetables, you are very welcome. We have a new volunteer, Kirat, who will be at Exeter Street Hall on Mondays from January. Kirat loves growing vegetables and flowers and will answer any questions you have about growing plants and how we can help you to come to the garden as the weather improves. We can start planting some seedlings as early as February!



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## SEWING GROUP NEWS

Last term we were busy as usual in the Sewing Group, making a range of lovely things. Our students included Halima, Maliha, Sherin, Rabab, Israa, Sima and Amal, and we welcomed two new volunteers, Millie and Blanca.



Here are just a few of the things we made – bags by Halima, Sima and Amal, and a top which Sherin made for her daughter. If you would like to join the group, please talk to one of our volunteers.



*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.*