

## The Official FOCUS Charity News Magazine

### Black Lives Matter: Where we stand

The killing of George Floyd in the USA this May was met with grief, anger and frustration by everyone at FOCUS – our staff, volunteers, trustees, beneficiaries, supporters, funders and partners. We have reflected on the injustice, intolerance and inequality that it has shone a light on, which have existed for too long, and we are committed to being a positive force for change.

We know that writing a statement is not enough. Our staff team has committed to a collective training opportunity that will help us to gain a deeper understanding of institutional racism, particularly referencing the Black Lives Matter movement.

#### We have started by taking the following steps:

- In our regular team meetings, we have shared our personal stories related to racism and privilege, reflecting upon our own views and implicit bias.
- We have had conversations with our volunteers and offered them the same training to take them on the same learning journey.
- We have been providing emotional support to young people and offering ways they can make a positive and constructive difference, including writing to their Local MP to tackle racism and injustice.
- We have compiled a resource list, providing insight into historical and contemporary racism and injustice. Training slides of information have also been built, to help improve our levels of understanding.
- Individually, we have been accessing information to understand the different forms of racism and how it can be reinforced individually, culturally, and structurally within society.
- We have gathered a small team of our young people that actively support Black Lives Matter and other anti-racism movements. They are producing leaflets highlighting the various types of racism and the importance of tackling social stigmas, to ensure well-informed conversations take place.

Here at FOCUS, we recognise, celebrate and support diversity and inclusion, because everyone deserves a future and an opportunity to thrive. We believe that Black Lives Matter.



### Recent Achievements

When **lockdown restrictions** forced us all out of the FOCUS building and into our own homes, we agreed that we wouldn't be 'working from home', but rather we'd be 'at home, trying to work'. This subtle difference took into account the additional challenge of managing both our domestic and professional responsibilities. Despite the obstacles in our way, we've had an incredibly successful few months. Here's a few highlights of our recent achievements:

We're delighted to have been selected as finalists of the **Niche Magazine Business Awards 2020** in the Charity of the Year category. Sponsored by Morningside Pharmaceuticals, this is a highly prestigious and much coveted award.

Two exciting **new members** have joined our Board of Trustees. Laurence Duncan is a highly respected business coach, bringing a broad range of knowledge, expertise and experience. And Hitz Rao is a renowned event photographer, entrepreneur and networker. We look forward to their contributions to our future plans.

KP Snacks, one of our wonderful partners, has recently **donated a range of equipment** for our allotment, including benches, raised beds, a ping-pong table and more. All the equipment was made by Terracycle from recycled crisp packets.

None of what we do would be possible without the support of our fantastic funders. We are indebted to the **National Lottery Community Fund** for providing £20,000 of additional funding to enable us to extend our support during lockdown to more young people. And we have been overwhelmed by the generosity of the Michael Bishop Foundation, who have confirmed that their long-term support has been extended to another year, with a grant of £100,000.

## Our Projects

Everything we do is developed from the ideas, passions, needs and interests of young people in Leicester. Our current projects include:



### INSPIRE

Inspire is a year-long personal development programme for adolescents between 13-16 years old. This project uses a range of activities, including residential experiences, community projects, mentoring and workshops, to help teenagers boost their social skills, confidence and aspirations for the future.



### LEICESTIVAL

Leicestival is a vibrant and exciting project supporting people aged 13-25. This project gets young people involved with Leicester's incredible calendar of cultural festivals and events. This ranges from volunteering and supporting festival management and helping backstage, to setting up their own attractions and stalls.



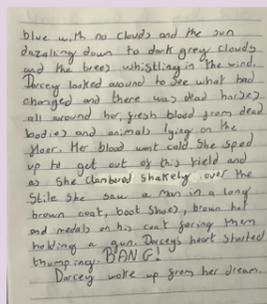
### BREATHING SPACE

Breathing Space supports young people aged 13-25 to develop the strategies and confidence to overcome mental health issues. We do this through projects based on our own allotment and in other green spaces.



### START

START is a project that uses mentoring, and environmental and adventure activities to tackle the issues faced by highly isolated young people, who are vulnerable to exploitation.



**GRACIE:** Winner of Leicestival's Descriptive Writing Competition



**JAYDA:** Winner of Leicestival's Art Competition



**AMY:** Winner of Leicestival's Photography Competition

## Project Highlights:

### Our Response to Coronavirus Lockdown

As with many charities, the lockdown enforced due to the coronavirus pandemic has put a lot of strain on us and our projects. However, we have acted quickly from home, and with the support of some of our dedicated and experienced volunteers, we established a range of online support activities.

- START has been running live and interactive cooking sessions.
- Inspire is producing a 'Happy Newspaper', capturing positive news stories to counter the negativity of the mainstream media. They have also set up a study support group for those struggling with education.
- Leicestival has been running quizzes – some of which the young people themselves were allowed to run – as well as art and mediation sessions and competitions. The project has also begun delivering E-training modules based on the care industry. The learning will contribute to skills development as they emerge from isolation.

All three projects have established a form of one-to-one support for issues around suicide, volatile relationships, homelessness, abuse, safety, social distancing, Isolation, mental health and wellbeing.

One of our staff team recorded over 1,500 individual messages with young people in the first 3 weeks of lockdown. Staff and young people have spoken about their experiences on local BBC morning radio.

Presently, we are working on the production of a 'Lockdown Cookbook', featuring young people's favourite home family recipes, which we're planning to have published. We are also rolling out our cooking project to more young people throughout the summer.



A 'Spot the Animal' piece made by some of our young people

## Meet Our Team

### Harsha Acharya

Manager of Leicestival



Harsha has worked with us since 2017, having worked for children's charities in local communities for almost-all of her career. Her warm, friendly nature and can-do attitude has helped to build Leicestival up to what it is. I sat with Harsha to talk about her time at FOCUS.

Harsha described joining FOCUS as a learning experience. The charity has taught her how to be a leader, admitting that she used to "shy away" from leadership roles before joining us. Even so, she told me that it is the liveliness and their vibrant personalities of the young people that keep her motivated as a youth worker.

*"They're not spiteful young people at all; they just need support. They have so much potential. They're kind, they're considerate, they're funny, they're mischievous. That's the type of people I've always worked with, but at FOCUS, there's just something special."*

I asked Harsha what she thought was the best way to support young people. Her answer: it comes down to "your approach". *"Being non-judgmental,"* she said, *"Accepting each and every young person for what they've done, who they are, and the lives they want to lead – their futures. Y'know, just believing in them. Even the little things, like picking up on and remembering their favourite food, can mean the world to them."*

A large part of Harsha's role, and her "biggest hurdle", is gaining support and permission from festival organisers. But not only does she gain the trust and approval of event organisers to work with us, but go "above and beyond" to help with their events. Thanks to this, many festivals and events now ask us to return the next year. *"They've seen [us] pulling together, and then delivering something that has also contributed to [their work]."*

As a final note, Harsha owed Leicestival's success to the wonderful young people we've been able to help.

*"For me, my biggest, biggest love is for the young people that attend. Whether they attend sessions, festivals, events, once, never again – it's down to them that it's been a success."*

## Volunteering at Focus

### Hasina

Project Support and Volunteer with START



Hasina is a passionate, hard-working volunteer who likes to get involved in any way possible. She loves motivating young people and getting stuck into sessions. Hasina has recently taken on a new role with us as Project Support. She believes that, if it wasn't for her volunteering here, she would not have had the confidence to do so.

"I heard about FOCUS through Voluntary Action Leicester. It was the first time I'd heard about them, and the START project sounded perfect for me. I came to the safeguarding training day and it opened my eyes to see what FOCUS was really about.

"I volunteer not because I'm expecting anything; it's about giving and supporting those in need. It's great working with others that have the same ethos and passion – that's what makes volunteering at FOCUS so nice.

"Volunteering is the highlight of my week! The ambience really appeals to me – it's the best environment. I get a sense of happiness and fulfilment seeing the motivation from the team working with young people. You also learn to improve on yourself and develop new skills. [...] Confidence and self-belief have been the two main areas I have improved on and moved forward with since being a volunteer at FOCUS.

"I have been looking to work with young people as a mentor for a while now, so this is something I want to continue to do. At the beginning I was looking into pastoral support, but this is not really for me."

## Where Our Money Comes From



Everything we do for young people is free to them. We rely on grants, donations, sponsorship and similar support from a range of individuals and organisations to fund our work. Without their generous support, none of it would be possible. Every donation, no matter how large or small, enables us to provide our vital services to young people, and we are always interested in talking to anyone who would like to work with us to achieve our goals.

In 2020, our major funders are the National Lottery Fund, Michael Bishop Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, KFC Foundation, Home Office, EEM, Wooden Spoon Charity, and Openwork Foundation.

From every £1 that we raise, 84p goes directly to support young people. We use the other 16p to keep the lights on, pay our bills and raise another £1.

## HOT TOPIC Domestic Abuse during the Coronavirus Lockdown

The coronavirus pandemic has marked the first time in recent history that we have been forced to stay at home with only the company of those in our household. Yet 'home' is not always a place of safety and support. While this is a difficult and worrying time for everyone, it is particularly so for young people who are isolated with people who are harming them.

There has been a significant increase in domestic and sexual violence nationwide, and some of this has surfaced amongst the young people FOCUS currently work with. Derogatory, verbal abuse in their relationships and abusive breakdowns between two parents are starting to become a stark reality. These cases have a serious mental and physical impact.

At FOCUS, our staff strive to provide one-to-one support to our young people, even during the lockdown, via WhatsApp and Zoom and refer them to specialist helplines.

If you or a loved one are currently dealing with domestic or sexual violence, know that you are not alone. Even if you can't leave your home, you can still access help and support through local and national helplines, online support, refugees police response, a silent call and other services.

UAVA is a service that covers Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and stands for United Against Violence and Abuse. They are a consortium of three local specialist providers of domestic abuse and sexual violence services, including support for children and young people. The helpline is available for 12 hours a day, every day (except Sunday) all year round. See below for some useful numbers and information.

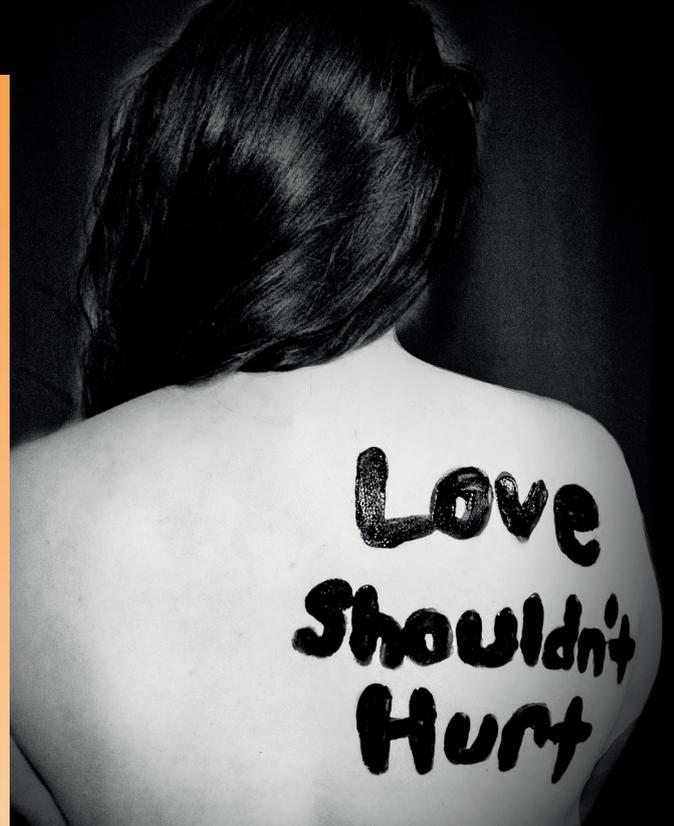
**UAVA Helpline** 0808 80 200 28 Monday to Saturday, 8am to 8pm  
Text support 07715 994 962  
info@uava.org.uk uava.org.uk

### Other Support Lines:

- <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/186642/coronavirus-friends-family-flyer.pdf> (Covid 19 help DV)
- <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/> (National helpline)
- <http://www.mensadvice.org.uk/> (Mens advice line)

### Need Help Now?

- <https://www.leics.police.uk/> or call 101 (999 in an emergency)
- <http://www.juniperlodge.org.uk/> (Sexual Assault Referral Centre)
- [https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent\\_solution\\_guide.pdf](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf) (Silent call if you can't speak)



## Thank You!

FOCUS Charity would like to take this opportunity to thank the following people for their input in the producing this newsletter: Jerusha Barnett-Cameron for editing, journalism and copywriting; Soar Valley Press for the design and printing; Hasina for 'Volunteer Spotlight' interview; and all of our wonderfully dedicated staff, who've written articles and contributed to the production of this newsletter.

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**FOCUS ON BUSINESS**  
Networking Lunch  
16<sup>th</sup> October 2020

FOCUS Charity invites you to our first FOCUS On Business Networking Lunch

This is a great opportunity to network with fellow business owners and support a local charity at a brand new city centre eatery – complete with socially distanced, scrupulously well trained staff and great food.

12 midday  
Open Networking and Find yourself a table

12.30pm  
Two course meal is served

2.30pm  
Event closes but the bar will remain open for networking

Tickets **£25**  
Includes Main Course + Dessert

**ORTON'S**  
BRASSERIE  
Orton Square opposite the Curve Theatre

Book your ticket at [emily.taylor@focus-charity.co.uk](mailto:emily.taylor@focus-charity.co.uk)