**Salford CVS Conference 14th September 2022**

**A Safe Place to Live Workshop**

**Room:** Exec Box 10/11, 3rd Floor

**Workshop facilitator:** Kush Chottera, Europia

**Panel speakers**:

* Safieh Eskandari, Community Doosti
* Patrick O’Dowd, Caritas Salford
* Aderonke Apata, African Rainbow Family

**Notes:** Rachel Sadler

Kush introduced himself and the session:

**A Safe Place to Live?** - With a growing hostile environment surrounding people seeking asylum, how can we support those individuals simply wanting a safe place to live? What does being a City of Sanctuary really mean? How can we campaign together? What practical support can we offer?

Kush explained that the City of Sanctuary concept began in America in the 1980s. In 2005, the City of Sanctuary UK was founded and in 2007, Sheffield became the first UK City of Sanctuary.

*City by city, community by community, we’re building a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.*

Kush invited the delegates to reflect for 60 seconds on ‘What safety means for you’.

**Safieh Eskandari - Founder of Community Doosti**

Safieh’s husband fled Iran fearing for his safety and sought asylum in the UK, in 2011 Safieh and her son joined her husband in the UK. Safieh ‘lost everything’ when moving to the UK and had to try to find stability and security. Coming to the UK meant learning a new language and culture. After 2 years, Safieh founded Community Doosti (Doosti meaning friendship). Community Doosti have built a space where people can feel safe and if English is not their first language, they provide support for example to fill in forms so people can access services and education. They help people become part of the community and find stability. Safieh explained that for her feeling safe is a place without judgement and a place where you are safe to make mistakes. Feeling safe can mean different things to different people, sometimes it is not peoples own choice, society has an important role to play. Safieh has had some bad experiences e.g. when trying to set up a bank account she was refused because of a ‘language barrier’ despite having the correct paperwork, but she did not give up and chooses to focus on the positives. Individuals within the community have a role to play and it is important to have a safe social media. It is important to bring all the community together, to share resources. The system needs to provide more support for people.

**Questions and comments:**

Do you still face prejudice?

Safieh explained that the biggest challenge for people seeking asylum is the lack of support and information particularly around access to education. The system needs to provide much more support and communication.

**Patrick O’Dowd - Director of Caritas Salford**

Caritas Salford is the Catholic social action charity for the Diocese of Salford, which provides services for people seeking asylum and refugees. Caritas Salford believes in upholding and protecting the dignity of the human person. It supports people through their day centres, through their education programme and through their community sponsorship programme. Caritas Salford has four key principles that are its focus:

* Welcoming
* Protection
* Integration
* Promoting

Patrick believes in the importance of making people seeking asylum welcome and was shocked at some of the negative reactions and attitudes on social media to a recent proposal to house people seeking asylum near his home in Middleton. Caritas Salford looks to accompany people on their journey for the long term, providing advocacy to help people navigate the system. The system can be skewed and is not easy to navigate. Patrick gave the example of helping a man whose first language was not English having difficulty topping up his electricity meter. It is only by speaking to people that you find out what challenges they have. The aim is to help people build their networks and become part of the community. The forth principle is promotion; Caritas Salford looks to share, collaborate and raise awareness. It is important not to exclude people and to include others, supporting people who may have fixed attitudes.

**Questions and comments:**

How do we get through the ‘us and them’ narrative? Where is the challenge to the media? How do we build bridges?

Patrick asked if to some extent we all come with our own ideological bias.

The system is broken, if we compare attitudes to those fleeing Ukraine compared to other countries.

Fear drives views and it is about feeling safe, we need to educate but also listen as a city and as a sector.

The issue we have as a sector is the Charity Commission have issued letters telling organisations not to be overly political but the sector is here to make change.

Do we lobby the Charity Commission?

Kush shared that it is important to remember that when people flee their homes they have experienced trauma and they need space to heal from that trauma. Recognising that trauma and healing reduces fear.

The group discussed the importance of faith and / or community in feeling connected to others. Connection is what people need.

**Aderonke Apata – Founder African Rainbow Family**

Aderonke came to the UK from Nigeria because at that time being a lesbian in Nigeria meant you could be jailed for up to 14 years. People face jail for even talking about it or not reporting others. Aderonke felt accepted by the British people when arriving in the UK but the system is toxic. How do we break that barrier? For example, it is a crime for people to work in the UK without papers, even for those with qualifications and experience. African Rainbow Family advocate for people when they cannot speak for themselves or do not have the language to say. They support people who have been displaced so they feel safe and can thrive. Aderonke stated that we need everyone to stand up to the people we have elected to make policies which can cause death. The people have the power; do not allow them to take it away. Let us use the power of our vote to demand change. People have the skills; they need to be given the power to develop. We need to be the media ourselves, do not speak to those converted go to others and change minds.

**Questions and comments:**

The hostile policy of no recourse to public funds means people are denied basic support.

There is a £10k fine in this country if you employ someone seeking asylum.

Power is still with the community, we need to put pressure on whoever is leading the administration.

We often work in silos and there is a tendency to blame others. We need to come together, stop blaming and use our platforms to work collectively as a sector.

Aderonke believes we can all do little things, which make a big difference, e.g. the Manchester Migrant Solidarity group were given a space to meet at Trinity Church Manchester for free. This small gesture has done so much good. Aderonke encouraged people to keep doing the little things and look for new ways. Do not be complacent, take back our power and use it.