JOURNEY LGBT+ ASYLUM GROUP

2024

What a year!

(12th December 2024)

The Journey Group held its annual Celebration and AGM, where we review the year with members and invited guests from organisations we have worked with over the last twelve months.
There was delicious food from west Africa, south east Asia and the Middle East. There were moving speeches given by our members about the help and love they've had from their Journey family. And there was a lot of dancing!
In between all that, we managed to agree the finances, as well as present our outgoing Buddies with certificates of appreciation, present outgoing director Jon with a card and gift, and all volunteers were presented with a beautiful rose for all their hard work.
Huge thanks to Carrs Lane Church Centre for hosting us, and to all the members and volunteers who manned the registration desk, served the food, gave presentations and helped clear up afterwards.

Invited guests said:

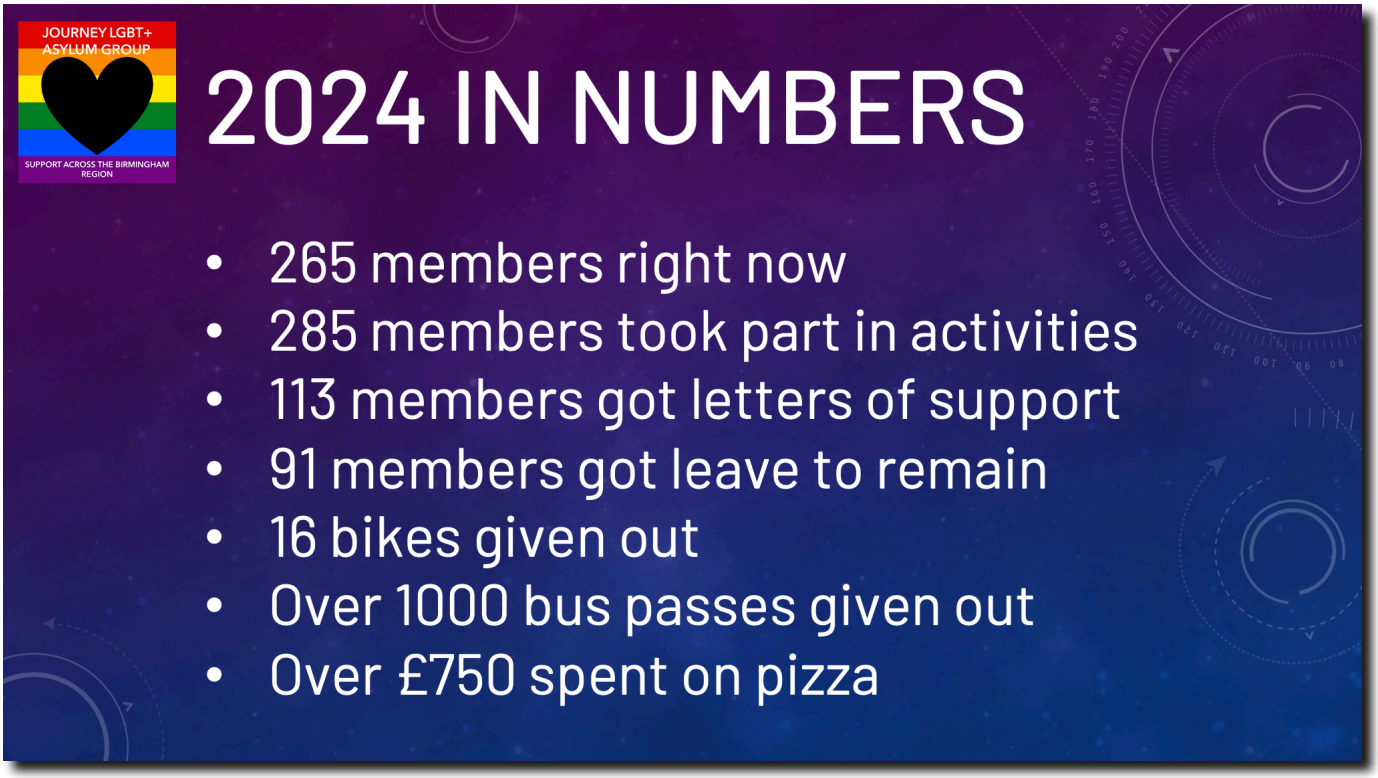
"What an incredible project you have created! It was a real treat to be able to hear so many positive stories from such a wide range of people who obviously appreciate the group so much. It was a real reminder of how important even the smallest things can be for people who have been lonely and afraid."

"I just wanted to say thanks so much for letting me join you all today. It was lovely, I felt very emotional and what you guys do it’s so important and needed, I feel honoured to have been able to witness all your achievements today."
"Thank you so much for having me on Wednesday. It was an honour to be there, and I really enjoyed reconnecting with the members. It was inspiring to see the impact you’re having and the community and family you’ve created."

Journey members said:

"A night to remember. It was so exciting."
"I really really enjoyed a lot. I can't express my feelings. it will be a memorable event in my life. I danced for the first time. Thanks to everyone who came to this event."

"Thank you all. It was a lovely afternoon full of fun, laughter and great food."
"This evening of love and happiness. Thanks to everyone."





Pride Heart

(4th December 2024)

Journey members who've been involved with the Pride Heart project took to the stage at Birmingham Rep Theatre on Friday night, as part of the Bedlam Showcase.

Pride Heart is a partnership between the Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group and Sampad. In weekly workshops, Ash Mukherjee facilitated activities that explored identity and wellbeing through a range of creative approaches.
Their powerful final performance dazzled the audience.

Audience members said:

"It was inspiring to see the group perform so well as an ensemble and witness their growth in confidence and pride in their achievements."
"You have truly shown the world what resilience, creativity and courage looks like."
"It was wonderful and I really enjoyed it and thank you for inspiring me and everyone else there - keep it up guys."
"Wow! I really enjoyed it. Next time I want to be part and parcel of this."

Pride Heart participants said:

"Thanks Ash for teaching us and enabling us to be more confident with ourselves. You got so much energy which we were all able to tap from. The project was very inspiring and well done to all the participants. We had great fun."
"I learnt a lot from you during the workshops. The performance was amazing. Everyone was perfect."
"Your dedication to creating a platform that amplifies voices and fosters inclusivity is truly inspiring. It's initiatives like these that make such a profound difference in people's lives."



The Pride Heart performers



Journey members who came along to watch and support

Light Up Fest

(2nd December 2024)

Several of our members joined the Light Up Fest procession through Cannon Hill Park this weekend, carrying lanterns that they'd made in community workshops.
After walking around the park to loads of cheers and joyful music, there was live music in the MAC's outdoor theatre, with food and drink for the participants.
Journey would like to extend a big thank you to Kirsten, Shelley and Oliver from Autin Dance for all their hard work and for making our members feel so welcome and involved.

Our members said:

"It was great and I'm glad I got to attend my first Light Up Festival and got to meet new people and I'm looking forward next year to attend it again."

"I enjoyed it. The good about is The Parade, walking around the Cannon Hill Park with our lanterns, and the audience were cheering and enjoying. It was nice and fantastic."





Buddy review meeting

(26th November 2024)

Our Journey Buddies held their quarterly review meeting recently, looking at what's working and what improvements can be made.
Buddies are an important part of our group, supporting new members to settle into the group, helping to organise and support group meetings, and representing the group at workshops and events. Many of our current Buddies are interested in taking on even more responsibility, so look out for new developments coming soon.

Our Buddies said:

"Being a buddy means you're caring about somebody else apart from yourself."
"You know you are making yourself useful."
"It helps you develop your communication skills."
"Being a Buddy is a big role in the group. The members depend on you, sometimes more than on a Journey volunteer, so its a remarkable role."



Get your tickets now!

(25th November 2024)

Roll up, roll up! Journey members will be showing off their crafting and performance skills in two events coming up this weekend.

Firstly, at 7.30pm on Friday 29th November, members will be taking part in the **Bedlam Showcase** at Birmingham Rep. Journey participants in the Pride Heart workshops, run by Ash Mukherjee for Sampad, will be sharing the work that they've done through embroidery, sound, text and performance.
Get your tickets here.

Then at 4.30pm on Saturday 30th November, members will be taking part in the **Light Up Fest** procession through Canon Hill Park. This is the culmination of weekly workshops making lanterns out of willow and paper. Journey members who have been attending will have the chance to show off their illuminated lanterns in a joyful walk. We're all keeping fingers crossed for dry weather!
This event is free and unticketed - just turn up!
You can find more information here.


LOVE



Hitting the headlines again

(12th November 2024)

Virginia's story has now been covered by the Metro.

Click here to read the article.

I was told I was teaching my daughters my ‘satanic evil behaviours’



FIRST PERSON

Virginia Wairimu

Published Nov 12, 2024, 12:15pm | **Updated** Nov 12, 2024, 12:16pm

Comment



From an early age, I knew being a lesbian would not be accepted in my family (Picture: Virginia Wairimu)

A dehumanising process

(1st November 2024)

Journey member Virginia and volunteer Sheila feature in this ITV special report on the UK's asylum process. It highlights the ways in which the system dehumanises and traumatises people who come here to seek safety.

Click here to view the film.



Love across barriers

(26th October 2024)

A big thank you to Birmingham Hippodrome for giving our members free tickets to 'Santi and Naz' - a theatre show about two young women, one Sikh, one Muslim, living in pre-partition India. It explores female friendship, coming of age, and coming out set against the backdrop of a country soon to be changed forever.

Our members said:

"I had a lot of fun. They were from different religions and different cultures, but if there is love there will be no barrier."
"I enjoyed it. It was a powerful love story of two girls who fall in love but they have different cultures and society keeps them apart."
"it was very good. I liked the show."



Green fingers

(22nd October 2024)

Some of our members got their hands in the earth at Martineau Gardens, as part of a wellbeing programme for migrants to the region. Asylum seekers, refugees and anyone who is not originally from the UK is welcomed with a hearty home-cooked meal, as well as free tea and coffee for the time they spend in the garden. There are loads of jobs to get stuck into, from planting seeds to picking fruit, raking leaves to weeding borders. Our intrepid members braved the October cold to get digging over veg beds, supervised by expert Martineau Gardens volunteers, Matt and Jacky.

Our members said:

"I enjoyed cleaning the garden and planting plants. I am very interested in this work, I like it very much."
"They were amazed when I told them how far I came. It was an activity and I loved it."



Thank you

(21st October 2024)

Treasurer Helen, along with members Virginia and Pankti, were delighted to accept a generous grant from Pride Community Foundation to support the group's running costs for another year.
The money will go towards supporting our members with food and travel, training our Buddies and volunteers, and covering overheads such as website and webmail fees.
A huge thank you from all of us to Pride Community Foundation for continuing to make our work possible.



Musical magic

(10th October 2024)

Five of our members enjoyed a night out at the theatre, thanks to donated tickets from Birmingham Rep. There was a lot of laughter, clapping along and even a few tears at 'Becoming Nancy', a story about a teenage boy in 1979 grappling with his identity after being cast as a girl in the school play. It's a fun and upbeat show, but also tackles some tough themes, such as racism and homophobia.

Our members said:

"i enjoyed it a lot. All in all it was a lot of fun."
"It was so nice to be in the theatre today. I really enjoyed it."
"I had a lot of fun with the presentation and how the topic was brought up and addressed. Thank you to the Rep."
"I enjoyed it very much."



Shining a light

(25th September 2024)

Light Up Fest is inviting people, including Journey members, to take part in a series of craft workshops, building lanterns from willow and paper. The sessions also include discussions around wellbeing and identity. They will culminate in a lantern procession through Cannon Hill Park at 4.30pm on Saturday 30th November. You can find out more on the MAC's website. We can't wait to see the beautiful lanterns our members will create!

Our members said:

"We had a lot of fun and it was very edifying."
"It was great and helpful and I enjoyed it."
"I love it."
"It was a great time."



Hitting the headlines

(23rd September 2024)

The Journey Group gets a mention in the Birmingham Mail, in an article about our member Virginia, and her campaign to stay in the UK.
In the article, Virgina talks about her support of other asylum seekers through being a Journey Buddy. These are established members of the group, who are given training and support to help new members find their feet. Buddies also give practical advice and signpost the members they support to sources of help.

You can read the full article here.
You can sign Virginia's petition here.



'I fled LGBTQ+ attacks in Kenya - but the Home Office say it's safe for me to go back'

An LGBTQ+ asylum seeker is fighting for her right to stay in the UK, fearing she will face violence if sent back to Kenya

NEWS By Nathan Clarke Community Reporter

05:30, 22 SEP 2024

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In YourArea

Virginia was born in Kenya and had to flee to the UK, as her safety and that of her family was in danger

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Queer motherhood

(21st September 2024)

Mobilise Arts put on a very thought-provoking and moving performance exploring the idea of 'queer motherhood'. The show is a collaboration between queer artists Hannah Phillips and Rachel Jones. It fuses live music, video and spoken word, and also incorporates elements of verbatim lived experience. Thank you to Hannah for inviting Journey members to be part of the audience.

Our members said:

"I really enjoyed it very much. I liked how important queer motherhood is or we can also be mothers."

"I really enjoyed the queer motherhood show. They mixed pain, joy and comedy. Also, the most important thing is that every person who can provide a good life for children deserves to have children, regardless of their sexual orientation. The most important thing is the future life and mental health of the children."



At the movies

(17th September 2024)

A big thank you to BIFF (Birmingham Indian Film Festival) for putting on a free community screening of new British film 'In Camera', along with a fascinating Q&A with director Naqqash Khalid. This intense and thought-provoking film roused a range of responses from the Journey members who went along.

Our members said:

"The movie was very good at the beginning, but the end of the movie scared me a lot."
"I'm glad I came to watch the movie. First and foremost, I loved the performance of the actors, the casting, and the way the actors were chosen. The film addressed many topics in a unique way. I saw new and different things under the theme of absurdity. The use of silence for several minutes was brilliant."


"A METICULOUSLY CRAFTED LABYRINTH"
"ONE OF THE BEST DEBUT FILMS OF THE YEAR"
"BOLD AND INVENTIVE"
BIFF PRESENTS
IN CAMERA
A film by Roopash Khalid
@weloveBIFF
@ConicFilm
SPECIAL SCREENING
TOILETS



Citizens of the world

(12th September 2024)

The Journey group were invited again to the New Art Gallery Walsall, to have a guided tour of its exhibitions, and specifically to view the Carlos Bunga exhibition 'Citizen of the World'. The exhibition drew on themes of migration, home, and identity, which many of our members resonated with and enjoyed about the exhibition. It was followed with an inspired clay sculpturing workshop, led by Trixiebella Suen at the gallery. Members drew on the themes of the exhibition to make pieces that reflected their ideas of home, migration, and memory.

Our members said:

"Walsall Art Gallery turned out to be an inspiring journey through various forms of creativity. From the moment I stepped in, I was enveloped by the calm atmosphere and the sense of anticipation that only a gallery can evoke. The space was thoughtfully designed, with each room guiding me through different styles and eras of art."
"It was really a beautiful experience. I enjoyed the art, especially the contemporary art. I also got to sculpt which was my first ever experience."


The New
Art Gallery
Walsall



Weekend treat

(28th August 2024)

A group of our members and volunteers attended the Birmingham Weekender event, packed with lots of pop-up experiences. We were invited to a workshop specially designed for us, run by the fabulous Bobbie Dazzler. There was lots of art and craft, food and even a mini cinema area. We saw an amazing vogue ballroom performance with the fabulous Eric Scutaro, and an amazing show by Gorilla Circus including dance trapeze and high wire walks, and with their hair hang artist suspended in the air while they spun and swung.

Our members said:

"This day was just fabulous."
"Good people, good time."
"Eric was on a different level. I really enjoyed it."
"It was nice to see music live."
"The Birmingham Weekender was amazing! The highlight for me was an incredible aerial rope dance where performers were suspended high above the ground. Watching them twist and turn mid-air

was magical and left me completely mesmerized. It was a perfect mix of beauty and excitement. Truly unforgettable!"



Picnic in the park

(11th August 2024)

At our annual picnic, Journey members and volunteers enjoyed food, drink and games in the sunshine. Volunteer Naz even brought homemade cupcakes with messages of positivity and support.
We also took the opportunity to take some photos to support the 'I am Virginia' campaign (see below).

Our members said:

"I had a blast today. It was so good to see everyone."
"Everything about the picnic was fun. it was beautiful."
"We had some beautiful moments today."
"I am very happy today."
"The picnic was awesome, a great way to spend time outdoors, relax, boost mood and improve

wellbeing. An opportunity to bond with my fellow Journey members, fun playing games and interact with old and new members - including face-to-face meetings with my contacts who I have only communicated with on the phone."
"It was my first picnic in Birmingham with my family. Best time with good vybz. Much love to all!"
"Thank you very much for this great day full of joy."
"Love is not easy to find but when you are with the right people it flows like rain. Be yourself. Proudly LGBT."





I am Virginia

(8th August 2024)

Virginia, one of our longstanding members, has launched a campaign to support her asylum claim. Not only is Virginia a popular and active member of the group, as one of our Journey 'Buddies', she has also given one-to-one support other members. She has also attended meetings to share her experiences and to speak up about the challenges faced by LGBT+ asylum seekers in the UK.
Virginia needs our help more than ever. As she says on her campaign page: "Your signature will show that you believe I am a refugee and I do need protection. This is about my life and my human rights. Yours could be the voice that makes all the difference."

Please give Virginia your support by signing her petition and 'liking' her Facebook page.

Comments left on her campaign include:

"Virginia is an incredible person and a truly important part of her community here in the UK. It is vital that she be given the opportunity to build a truly safe and happy life here."
"I know you well and see the valuable support you give to other LGBT asylum seekers and asylum seekers as a whole here."

"Virginia is a wonderful person who has shown so much strength in the face of the cruelties she's faced ... she has been tirelessly advocating for the rights of other marginalised people. Don't give up Virginia, we're all behind you!"



Stand up to hate

(7th August 2024)

With rumours of a planned EDL attack on Birmingham Refugee and Migrant Centre, Journey volunteers Alex and Sheila went along to join the hundreds of people standing in solidarity against them.
The EDL never showed up, but hundreds of local people did, including representatives from dozens of community organisations.
There were rousing speeches celebrating the role that immigration has played in building Birmingham, and calling for unity and love to combat hate and division.
You can watch coverage of the gathering on SkyTV's YouTube channel here.


cappadocia
restaurant
no
one
is
illegal



Pride Heart

(25th July 2024)

Ash Mukherjee led our July meeting this week, a taster of the forthcoming Pride Heart project, in collaboration with Sampad. Ash is a dance performance director and wellbeing facilitator. In a fun-packed session, our members made some positive affirmations, learnt about Pride history through a team quiz, refocused with some guided meditation, and crafted their very own pride hearts. Volunteer Sammy also brought some delicious home-cooked food to share.
You can find out more about Ash in this video interview, including a mention of his work with Journey at 36 minutes in.

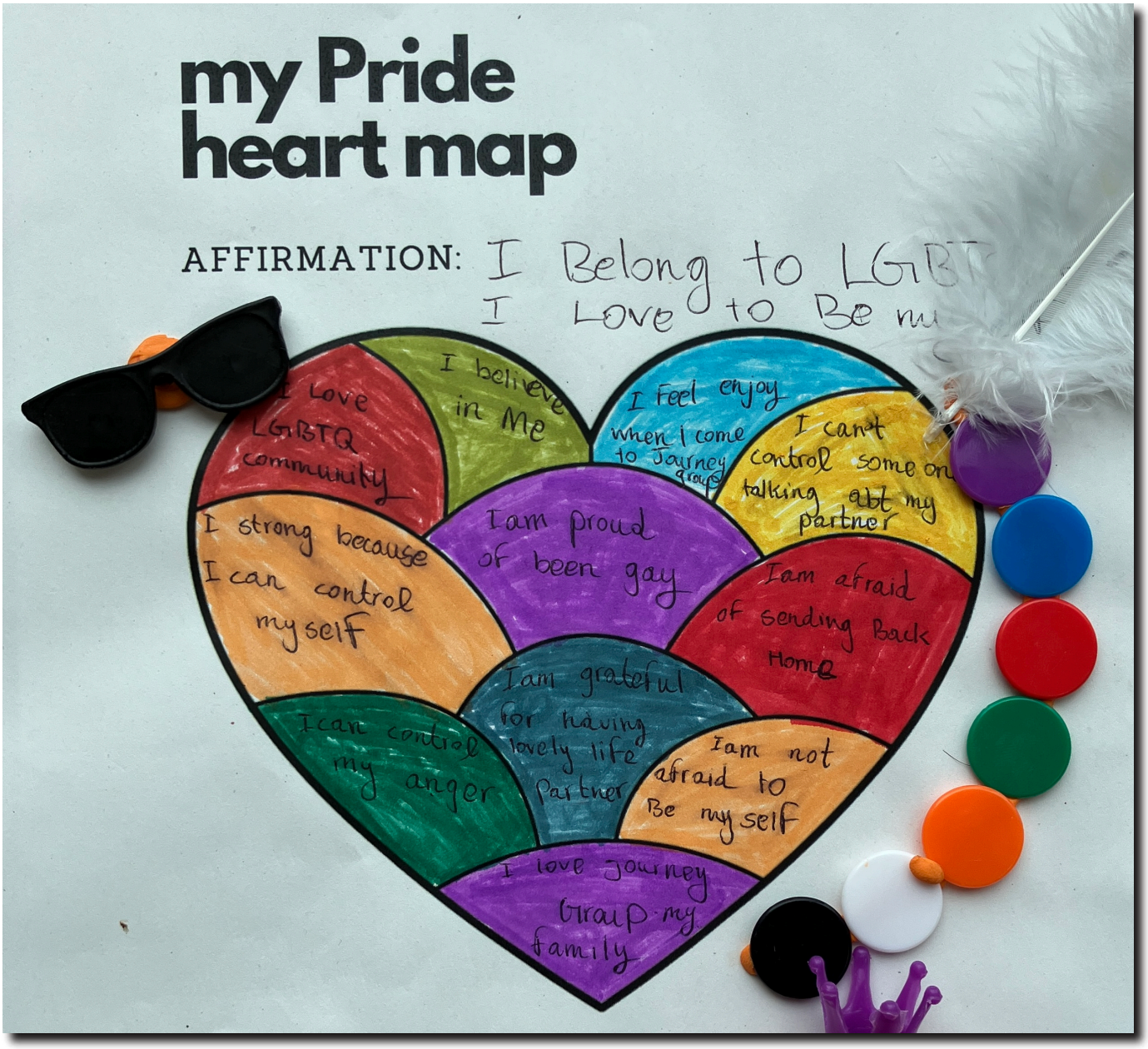
Our members said:

"It was amazing."
"It was nice having fun around. The food was yummy."
"This meeting is full of fun and emotions. Thank you so much for making our meeting exciting, comfortable and relaxing and I'm really happy and proud to meet everyone."
"I really enjoyed and was excited to meet such nice and beautiful people."

"The best part was the quiz! Am enjoying the meeting."

"My best part is answering questions because the chocolate going to winner."




my Pride
heart map
AFFIRMATION: I Belong to LGBT
I Love to Be
I Love LGBTQ community
I believe in Me
I Feel enjoy when I come to Journey group
I can't control some one talking abt my partner
I strong because I can control myself
I am proud of been gay
I am afraid of sending Back Home
I am grateful for having lovely life Partner
I can control my anger
I am not afraid to Be myself
I love Journey Graup my family

Love is an Act of Rebellion

(23rd July 2024)

Stories of Hope and Home is is a project focused around building a community and creating safe space in which Asylum Seekers and Refugees can explore and share their stories.
Thirteen members went to see its latest performance 'Love is an Act of Rebellion' at Birmingham Rep. The performance was created by asylum seekers exploring how, in the context of the hostile environment and the intent to divide, exclude and isolate, love is an act of rebellion, and how small acts of support can mean so much.

Some Journey members were part of the performance. One said: "it was actually my life, the performance reflected my life since I arrived in the UK. I chose to perform as Charity, the good people, because I have really got so much help from charities - clothes, accommodation, and food. Without charity I would be homeless."

Our members in the audience said:

"it was really nice to be there and I really enjoyed the performance of our Journey members in the show."
"It really reminded me of what I went through as an asylum seeker and at the end it was happy to see smiley happy faces."
"The song at the end made me cry."



Anyone for tennis?

(21st July 2024)

Five of our members braved the rain on Saturday to enjoy a new electropop performance about queer invisibility in tennis. 'Fairlight' contrasts history and contemporary accounts to highlight the fact that there has never been an out male professional tennis player. It takes place on a tennis court, so our members got to visit Edgbaston Archery & Lawn Tennis Society - and shelter from the rain in the club house.

Our members said:

"This was my first experience in my life to watch a tennis game so it was amazing."
"I enjoyed it."
"I liked the movement and gestures of the players as well as the singers."



Rocking out

(15th July 2024)

Journey members enjoyed both sides of the big Brum Rocks community rock concert this weekend. Pankti joined the choir with other members of the public and local singing groups. Other members took their seats in the audience for an evening of rock classics played by hundreds of musicians. Big thanks to Misfits Music for the free places, and for putting on the whole event.

Our members said:

"It was good time."
"I enjoyed it coz there was banghra and variety of local music and musicians and country music as well."





Planning for the future

(8th July 2024)

Journey volunteers gathered at the weekend to contribute to our strategic planning for the next two years. Flóra Raffai from Rapport Coaching is working with us - members and volunteers - to help us explore who we are and what we do.

With Flóra's help, we will achieve a clear mission statement, and a better understanding of how we can best support our members in the long term.



Tent of dreams

(7th July 2024)

Journey members headed to the Dream Tent in Digbeth to experience Birmingham Opera Company's production of Tippet's 'New Year'. They were also there to support fellow member Gabriel who was one of the community participants in the show.
Not only did they get to experience modern opera at its most spectacular, they also added their own new year's resolutions to the accompanying display board.

Our members said:

"I enjoyed this show because of its characters and story of girl and boy. When they were in a relationship they faced hard times and some times the girl was in prison, so they feel very sad. The situation is in not their hands, but after some time they meet again. I think overall I enjoy a lot because their ending was happy, and also credit goes to the opera team - they preformed the show very well."
"I had a great time."
"It was amazing. I enjoyed very well."
"I was really happy. I had a great time seeing my brother among the performers."
"The arrangements were good and they were acting good and also the story was amazing. I really enjoyed all my time there."





Journey member Gabriel (fourth from the right) enjoying well-deserved applause.

Film star

(3rd July 2024)

One of our members, Kwaku Appiah, is featured in a new short film, part of the (un)entitled project from Listen Up!, an initiative funded by Comic Relief to raise awareness of homelessness. Listen Up! is a collaboration between homelessness charity Groundswell and On Our Radar, an award-winning media organisation that works with marginalised people to help them tell their stories. There is also a cameo appearance from Journey volunteer Sheila.

Watch 'Kwaku - A Safe Place To Call Home' (7 minutes).

Kwaku was also interviewed by Groundswell reporter Karen, in this video where he talks about his life in Ghana and journey to the UK (6 minutes).

Kwaku also interviewed another asylum seeker, Steve, about his experiences. You can listen to the audio here (23 minutes).



Temporary pause

(26th June 2024)

The Journey group is putting a temporary halt on taking new members. We now have over 300 members, who are supported by a very small volunteer team. We are also currently undertaking a strategic review - looking at what we do and how we do it - and we need some time and space to do that effectively.

In the mean time, we will continue to support our existing members with meetings, activities and one-to-one support. We are still very much open to enquiries from new volunteers and organisations that would like to work with us.
When we are able to open to new members we will put a message on this site and notify referral organisations.

If you are an LGBT+ asylum seeker or refugee in the West Midlands, look at our Useful information page for other organisations that can help you.



Queens for a day

(24th June 2024)

This weekend was Queens Heath Pride - a day when Kings Heath dons its rainbow flags and the community gathers to celebrate the world's shortest Pride march. Kings Heath Action for Refugees had a stall offering bags, t-shirts, badges, keyrings and glitter face painting, all to raise money for Journey. Our intrepid volunteers, (L to R) Shukri, Sheila and Alex, braved the heat and the crowds to help on the stall and raise awareness of what we do. If you missed the event, don't worry - you can buy KHAR merch any time you like in its online shop.



Who are you?

(19th June 2024)

This month we asked the question 'Who am I?' with a session exploring identity. Led by educational psychologist Doctor Anjam Sultana, we discussed different parts of our identity - ethnicity, religion, level of education, status, gender, clothes, health, sexuality, family, age, employment and nationality. We also came up with more things that can be important parts of who we are - food, money, hobbies. We then got out the pens and paper to create visual representations of our inner selves. There were a lot of very thought-provoking discussions and drawings.

Our members said:

“Thank you for much for making it so exciting, comfortable and relaxing for us to attend and I am really happy and proud to meet everyone.”
“It was my first meeting with the journey group. I enjoyed it a lot, getting to know everyone new.”
“It was a wonderful day.”





Volunteer training

(11th June 2024)

When giving support, our volunteers often hear upsetting accounts of what our members have been through. This can lead to ‘vicarious trauma’ - where hearing about someone else’s experiences impacts our own emotions, behaviour and health. Last week, some of our volunteer team spent a training day with Debra Gordon and Isabel Stahlberg, psychological therapists with extensive experience of helping people recover from trauma related to a wide range of experiences, such as torture, drug and alcohol addiction, grief and relationships. Through a series of activities, they helped us learn how to recognise vicarious trauma, and to develop tools, systems and strategies to support our own wellbeing.

Our volunteers said:

"It was an excellent opportunity to discuss our boundaries between empathy and professional detachment when faced with individuals reporting severely traumatic experiences, and to get ideas about how to protect our own well-being."
"It was useful hearing about the concerns and challenges each of us experience, and realising that in many ways these are quite similar."
"We spend so much time focusing on the needs of our members, it made me realise how important it is to also spend time on our own wellbeing."



Debra and Isabel (on the right) with six of our Journey volunteers

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Art as recovery

(30th May 2024)

The Journey Group gets a mention in this interview with performance artist Ash Mukherjee. He tells Asian Voice about his work with our members on the Pride Face project, and its role in his artistic

focus on recovery from postcolonial queer trauma.



Loud and proud

(27th May 2024)

The sun shone on Birmingham Pride this weekend as over 50 Journey members took to the streets to walk in the parade.

Our members said:

“The most beautiful day of my life."
"I loved seeing the joyous expressions of freedom and pride on everyone’s faces in the celebration of our diversity. The energy within the larger community was uplifting!"
"The experience was great and exciting at the same time. Everyone was so welcoming."
"I really enjoyed the parade very well and it was the happiest day of my life."



Before the parade



After the parade

Having a laugh

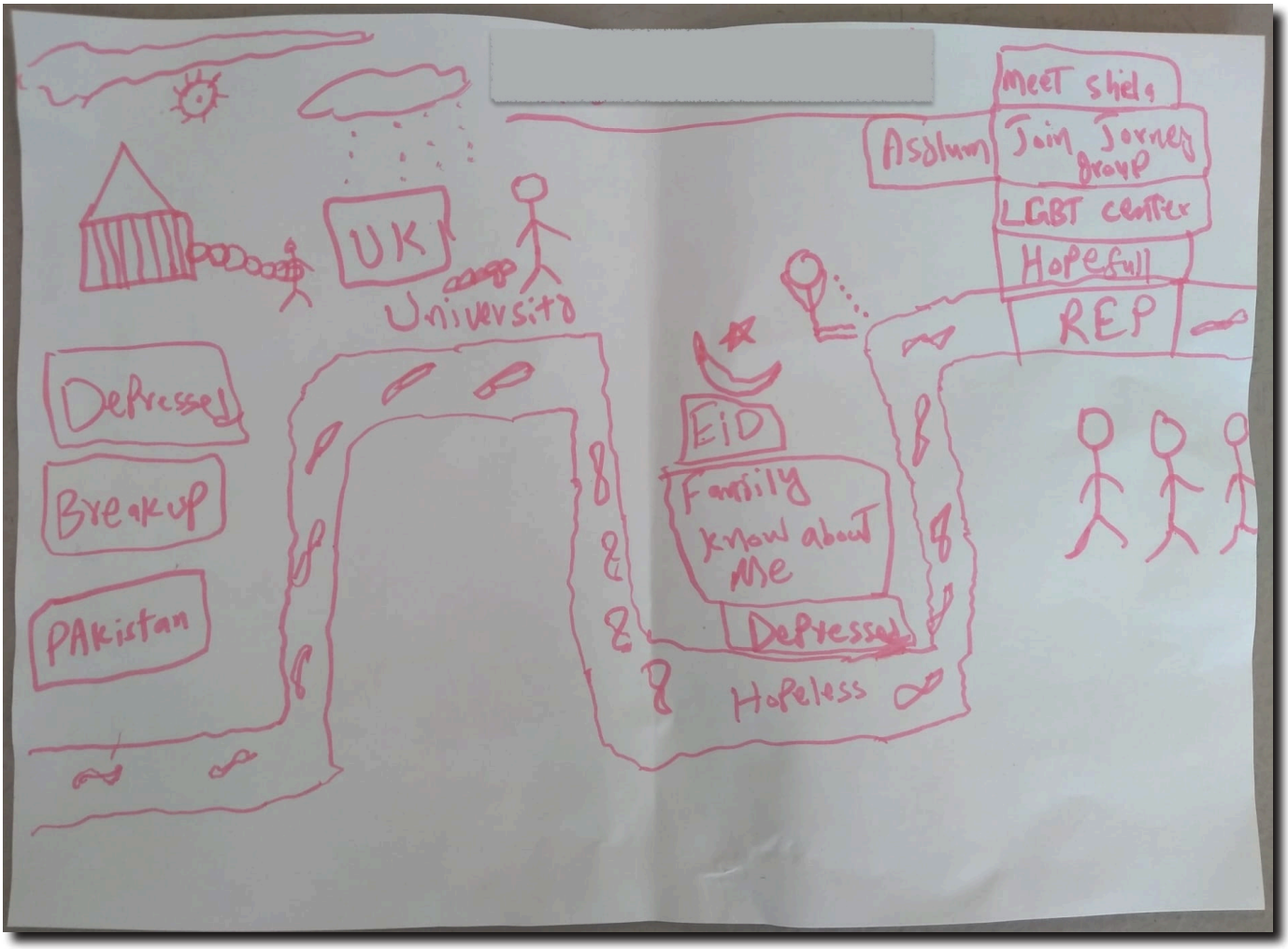
(24th May 2024)

We had two special guests at our May in-person meeting this week. Rob and Ant run 'LGBTeehee', a community arts-based initiative to benefit mental health resilience through comedy. Their mission is “to create a world where people are free to laugh and be themselves”. At the session, they delivered a taster of an upcoming project about “laughing together, having fun together and supporting each other through life's highs and the lows." Our members were encouraged to draw and share their personal journeys, highlighting the key turning points.
Rob and Ant will deliver a further session with Journey members in August, followed by a series of workshop in the autumn.

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Our members said:

“I was very excited today. The meeting was really good, I appreciated it."
"We enjoyed today’s meeting, because there were some fun activities, and also everyone got to draw some stories, and also the game we played at the start of the meeting was full of fun and laughter."



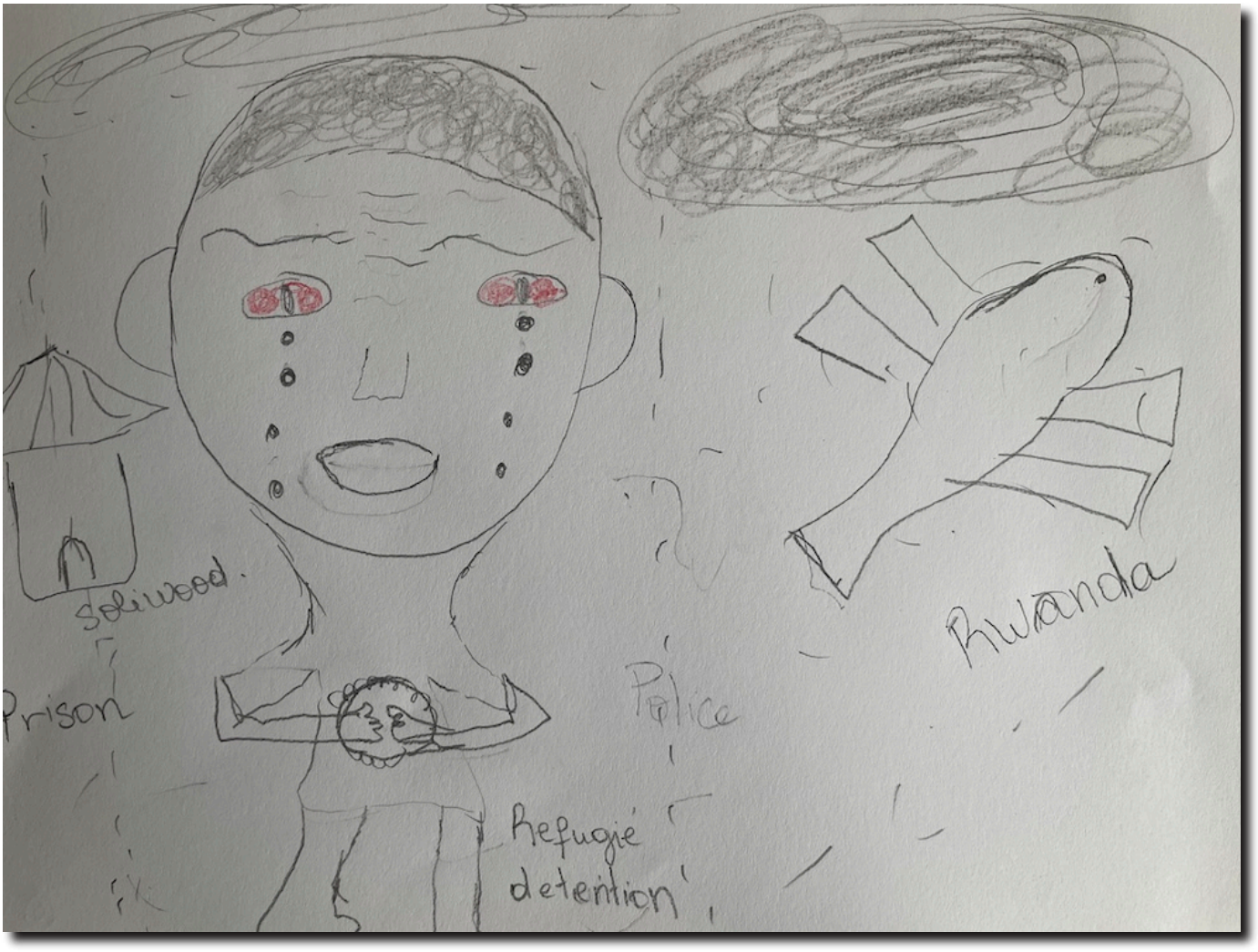
Sharing stories

(17th May 2024)

Last week, eight of our members took part in creative discussion workshops with Diego Garcia from the University of Nottingham. Diego's research focuses on gathering stories and insights to improve understanding of the issues facing LGBT+ asylum seekers, to influence positive changes in the UK asylum system. In the workshops, our members depicted their asylum experiences through drawings. They also discussed the role the Journey Group plays in their wellbeing. Diego said: "It has been really interesting and I hope the participants have also enjoyed their time today." Diego is working with a number of groups across the UK and eventually plans to create an exhibition of participants' stories and pictures.

Our members said:

"It was really good, interesting questions and answers. Also helpful as well."
"It was an interesting enjoyable session."



Strike a pose

(16th May 2024)

One of the partners that Journey collaborates with is dance organisation Fabric. Every week it gives four Journey members a free place in the Vogue and Waacking class, led by Eric Scutaro (in the

middle in the photo). As a refugee himself, Eric understands how the joy of dance can support good mental and physical health for our members. Waacking and Voguing dance styles arose from the LGBTIQ+ community in the 1970s and form an important part of queer history and culture.

Our members said:

"It was lovely dance class today. I enjoyed it a lot."
"Today we were taught some great moves. I will try those moves on Saturday night."
"I feel so much better after every dance session."



Just Be You

(13th May 2024)

Three of our members enjoyed the premiere of a brand new family musical at the MAC this weekend. 'Just Be You' explores themes of wellbeing, nature and identity. The show was written and directed by Hannah Phillips, and is a collaboration between Mobilise Arts and MAC's Generation Q Collective. Journey would like to extend a big thank you to Hannah for organising tickets for our members.

Our members said:

"I was so bored, but after attending this event I enjoyed so much. It was amazing."
"I really enjoyed the children dancing, and many more things. it was so exciting."

"It was full of fun and I liked watching kids dancing there. It made my day good."



Blazing a trail

(7th May 2024)

Journey members joined Birmingham Blaze FC at their weekly training session last week. The club is an LGBT+ football team which competes in local leagues, as well as nationally and internationally.

Our members said:

"It's been an amazing football session."
"I managed to return to my football training sessions after more than a decade. I truly appreciate the opportunity and am looking forward to going again next week as i am pushing to regain my full fitness."
"Thank you so much for this pleasure day."
"I had a great time, really had fun. It was very interesting and I'm looking forward to the next one!"



The hills are alive

(30th April 2024)

Last Saturday, 24 of our members put on their walking shoes and headed outdoors, for a walk in the Lickey Hills Country Park to see the flowering of its famous bluebells.
Accompanied by our intrepid volunteers, they explored the forest, taking on the challenges of the hills and the mud, to see the flowers. Everyone enjoyed a picnic, before heading uphill to take in the views of Birmingham in the distance.

Our members said:

"The bluebell walk at the Lickey Hills was pure magic! The scenery was stunning, and walking hand in hand with fellow journey members made it extra special. Climbing those hills felt like conquering mountains together, and the picnic break was filled with laughter and tasty snacks. Sure, we might have some aches now, but the happiness from exercising together overshadows it all. A huge thank you to all the volunteers and organisers who made this unforgettable day possible. I can't wait for the next adventure with this amazing group."



Batting above average

(10th April 2024)

Four of our members had a great time at a cricket taster event, organised by Out4Cricket. They got to try out their skills at the indoor cricket school at the world famous Edgbaston Stadium. Thank you to Birmingham Unicorns and Warwickshire Cricket Foundation for giving our members such a warm welcome.

Our members said:

"First we started a warm-up game, throwing the ball to each other. Then they divided us into teams - some chose a tennis ball, but I chose a red ball. It was my first experience in my life to play with a red ball. All the club members were really nice. I would like to say special thanks to every one of them. It was really amazing and enjoyable."
"It was good and I really enjoyed today's event."
"It was a great day. I was so happy that after a long time I got to play cricket again. They were so friendly. It was an amazing day."



Breaking fast

(8th April 2024)

Over 20 Journey members attended an LGBTQ+ Iftar organised by Naz and IMAAN on 24th March in Birmingham city centre.

Our members said:

"It was great. I like fresh fruits, chicken wings and spinach with chicken was my favourite ever. Most importantly the environment was so comfortable and it was a great social. Thanks for inviting us."
"Thank you all for the party we enjoy, but especially I have been lonely since 8 months but today I do this outing and enjoy Iftar party, and see all my journey family and the food was fantastic."
"The Iftar event was so good, there was a lot of food and all tasted great. The event was arranged according to the same ways Muslim communities celebrate Iftar. It really refreshed my memories. It made me happy. I meet with new people and the Iftar was not just for Muslims, other people came as well - thats the very good thing because it reminds us we are all equal, no one has priority because of culture, religion and colour - which I found great."



Exploring belonging

(3rd April 2024)

Last Saturday, 18 of our members visited the New Art Gallery Walsall to see 'The World that Belongs to Us' - an exhibition featuring artists of the South Asian diaspora and exploring themes of queer world-making, community and belonging, and migrant storytelling. We were given a lovely guided tour of the exhibition by the Head of Exhibitions, Deborah Robison, followed by a collaging workshop led by Trixie Suen. The collaging workshop drew on the themes of the exhibition with members exploring what identity and home meant to them through the pieces they made.

The exhibition and collaging workshop was a really impactful and inspiring experience.

Our members said:

"Exploring the art gallery and trying out the collage workshop was awesome! Seeing all the cool artwork and getting to make our own collages was so much fun. It was great hanging out with everyone and sharing our thoughts on the experience."

"I really enjoy the trip, it was so beneficial for my mind because few days ago I isolated myself because I was so stress. The Journey group, the workshop, seeing people happy make me feel very good. The workshop with my culture's material makes me remember where I come from and how proud I should be about myself."

"It was a beautiful moment in my life and I definitely created a core memory. I enjoyed every moment - the art, the stories behind them. I got to know so many things it felt like we were kids again while crafting which was amazing."

"Yes I really enjoyed the trip yesterday, it was an amazing trip. Thank you much for leading this trip and for guiding us. The art about floods was really beautiful and also learning about Sunil Gupta's picture with his boyfriend was really nice. In addition the last workshop was amazing, enjoyable after long time I tried and presented in front of all members. It's increased my boldness. In the last I am thankful to gallery member. She nicely explained every art of the gallery and other member was also so kind and nice."





Healthy living

(21st March 2024)

Our monthly meeting this month focused on health and wellbeing. Nigel from Birmingham LGBT Centre's sexual health team talked to our members about the welfare services available at Birmingham LGBT Centre, including sexual health clinics, testing for HIV and STIs, counselling, support groups and support for people who have experienced domestic or sexual violence. Members then shared their wellbeing tips, and finished the meeting with some deep breathing exercises and singing.

Just some of our members' suggestions of what to do if you're feeling low:

- Take a shower
- Talk to someone
- Watch a movie
- Go for a walk
- Listen to music
- Read a book

- Learn something new
- Cook and eat something good
- Put on your best clothes and makeup
- Have a good cry
- Close your eyes and breathe deeply
- Get some sleep
- Think about why you were born and what the future might hold





International Women's Day

(12th March 2024)

To celebrate International Women's Day, ten women from Journey took part in a workshop at the MAC organised by In Her Shoes.

The organisation creates opportunities and spaces for women and girls to come together, share creative experiences and have fun. At this workshop, participants sang songs created over the last five years by In Her Shoes with other women from Birmingham. They also got to create their own song.

The event had a powerful effect.

Our members said:

"It was my first time to do something special on International Women's Day. It's good to know what is happening around the world, and I learnt a lot."
"It was amazing, listening to music that was touching and related to my story when I moved to a new country with no friends and family. The Afghan women too was awesome because it also relates to what a minority of some African countries still believe in, saying a woman's place is in the kitchen. I

am happy I made it, and it made me feel a sense of belonging."
"Being part of this workshop reminded me that I am not alone in my journey. Hearing the stories of other women and seeing how their experiences resonated with mine was truly uplifting. Music has a unique way of bringing people together and this workshop was a beautiful reminder of that. I'm grateful for the opportunity to connect with others and share our voices through song."
"I enjoyed the singing because it's always good seeing women from different cultures with the same fighting."



Journey members with musicians from In Her Shoes

Here and queer

(4th March 2024)

Last Friday, three of our members got to enjoy ‘Queer My Throat’ at the MAC - an eclectic journey through queer history with songs, dance, comedy, drag and even an interactive quiz.

A huge thank you for the free tickets to Hannah Phillips, who runs the Generation Q Collective. This is a project through which emerging LGBTIQIA+ artists explore their gender and sexuality,

intersected with other areas of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, class, disability, faith and mental health. ‘Queer My Throat’ is a showcase of their work.

Our members said:

“It was really amazing. We really enjoyed the competition.”
“I had a splendid and excellent time, most notably the history and struggles that LGBTQ people went through decades ago to fight for the rights and pride we are enjoying today.”



Training new Buddies

(1st March 2024)

Journey Buddies play a key role in the Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group. They are members, who are given training so that they can offer support and a compassionate ear to other members, and to the group as a whole.

This week, eleven Journey members stepped up to become new Journey Buddies. They attended a training session to equip them for the role, which included safeguarding, setting boundaries and advice from our existing Buddies.

Our Buddies said:

"We are the heart of the Journey LGBT+ Asylum group."
"It was very informative as well as a very good time, and the topics we discussed will help us now and later on in life as well!"
"It was a Saturday well spent and we learnt a lot and had great fun, not to mention we also enjoyed eating together!"
"It was really impactful and educational. Looking forward to transferring all I learnt today into my role."
"So much learnt, and a lot more to achieve in this Buddy role."
"The volunteers are my inspiration to be a buddy. I want to give back what I received from the group."



Some of our Journey Buddies - old and new

Move your feet!

(24th February 2024)

Thank you to Birmingham Rep for donating free tickets to their uplifting and colourful show 'Bhangra Nation'. Five of our members - and two of our volunteers - got the chance to clap, laugh and dance along to the lively production, which blends different varieties of south Asian music - Bhangra, Kathak, Ghazal, Bollywood - with traditional musical songs, a bit of hip hop and spectacular Dhol drumming. Everyone left with a big smile on their face.



Singalong

(22nd February 2024)

February's meeting had our members singing the praises of Birmingham Opera Company - literally! Four of the team - Diandra, Nyasha, Melissa and Sam - led a lively singing and performing workshop which got our members up on their feet and singing together, and even recreating a scene from Bizet's 'Carmen'. Plus we had the privilege of getting a private performance from Samantha Oxborough, who sang the national anthem at the Commonwealth Games opening ceremony in 2022.

Our members said:

"The meeting was amazing! Couldn't stop smiling, I was just filled with joy! I really enjoyed myself." "It was absolutely wonderful. For me it was a new experience and good voice exercise. I really enjoyed the song."



Changing policy

(19th February 2024)

Five Journey members went to Birmingham Council House last week to share their stories with members of Birmingham's Proud Rainbow City Partnership. This is a group of stakeholders who aim to make Birmingham a safe and inclusive city for all communities.

Virginia said: "I attended the meeting to share the plight of LGBTQ asylum seekers as this meeting was a safe, friendly space." Kassa said: "I wanted to raise awareness of the issues and challenges we face, and lobby the Partnership to bring about change on these matters in innovative ways."

The issues discussed included housing, health, mental health, poverty and the importance of safe spaces, accessible activities and building community. It's not easy to go to an imposing building and

tell a room of strangers about the struggles you face, but our members spoke up with courage and clarity.

Kassa said: “It was an informative meeting that initiated some great links. I felt our voices were heard and opened doors for future engagement and collaboration.” Virginia said: “I hope by highlighting our problems the people in the meeting can influence policy changes and make our lives a bit better.”





Biruk's story

(7th February 2024)

One of our members, Biruk, was helped with housing by Micro Rainbow, an organisation that provides safe housing for LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees.

Biruk wrote a blog post for LGBT+ History Month, about his asylum journey and finding his purpose in a caring role. You can read the article on the Micro Rainbow website, here.



News from 2023

The Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group is a registered CIO (charitable incorporated organisation), number 1212001. It is organised entirely by volunteers.



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