

“Victims of the holocaust must never be forgotten, be they Jewish, gypsies, gay and bisexual men and women, or opponents of the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

“We also look with sadness at the world today, where genocide and ethnic cleansing still continues in large parts of the world, resulting in the death of men, women and children; while others flee their homes to seek sanctuary across borders some many thousands of miles from their homeland. Most end up in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Others, some of who are now living with us in Coventry – a city renowned for its peace and reconciliation - have had horrendous and dangerous journeys to arrive at a place of sanctuary.

“Among those adding to the culture and diversity of our rich city, are people from the Middle East, Africa and several parts of Asia, as well as those who fled ethnic cleansing within parts of Europe in the 1990’s.

“The Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre working in partnership with Coventry City Council, other agencies and charities including the cathedral, churches, mosques and temples try to provide a welcome for these people on arrival. Continuing support is offered as they become more integrated into the surroundings of this great city. The generosity and kindness of many ordinary citizens in helping and welcoming them to Coventry, should also not be forgotten.

“At Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre - which is based at Norton House on Bird Street - we provide support and assistance in helping new arrivals to settle and integrate into the wider community. This includes advice and support in housing, health, immigration, ESOL, therapy services; as well as helping to improve their chances of securing employment and education, so that they can contribute to the city and wider community.

“Alongside me I would like to introduce Julia and Abdul, former clients who I am now proud to say are both work colleagues. Julia and Abdul would both like to briefly explain their journey before arriving in Coventry, and how life has changed for the better since their arrival. Some of you may recall that Abdul spoke at the same event two years ago, but would like to explain where he is at now.”

***Toni Soni, Interim Centre Director, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre***

***Holocaust Memorial Day event, Broadgate, Coventry – Friday 26 January***