**Project Update – April 2020**

**Coronavirus Response**

In line with government advice, we are practicing social distancing and working remotely for the foreseeable future. Like everyone else this has had a significant impact upon our work, particularly our planned outreach work to engage directly with migrant groups, which is now on hold for the foreseeable future. However, the overall work of the Project continues and we are attending meetings by remote conferencing, helping to coordinate the sector response to the crisis in the region and advocate for the support voluntary groups require during this period of uncertainty.

Last week we hosted a web meeting with voluntary sector groups to understand how they are currently providing support to migrants, issues that have been identified and how services can be best delivered remotely going forward. This has enabled us to communicate needs to partners and statutory bodies, ensuring that the views of the sector are represented in local discussions.

We are hosting another meeting on Friday 3rd April at 14:00 and would welcome any representatives from any voluntary group who would like to dial in and share their views. Please let me know if you would like joining instructions. Further meetings will also be held on a regular basis.

At a local level, we are supporting the COVID-19 response being coordinated between Birmingham City Council and BVSC, by acting as the thematic lead covering migrant and asylum seekers. The process should help to offer a point of contact and utilise existing capabilities in the sector to facilitate the response across the city. Updates will be given as the process develops, but if you have any questions please get in touch.

It has been really pleasing to see that the online discussion forum that was set up to support the Destitution Steering Group has been widely used to connect groups and share knowledge during the past few weeks. Membership is open to any voluntary sector organisation in the region and if you would like to join again, please contact us.

**Project Governance**

Sharon Palmer has stepped down from her role as Independent Chair of the Project. We would like to sincerely thank her for her support and guidance during our first twelve months. A new Chair will be appointed shortly and we will then be in a position to resume Steering Group meetings, although these are initially likely to take place remotely.

**Early Action Work**

Following the recent WM Funders Event focusing on health inequalities, we are taking part in a Working Group looking at how best to develop Early Action principles in migration work and ensure that key stakeholders are able to engage with these. We are also helping to plan the next event in the series which will focus on cohesion and integration.

**Council Engagement**

Despite remote working, we continue to engage with partners at a local authority level. This includes not only the ongoing City of Sanctuary Partnership Board with Birmingham City Council, but also seeking to expand the knowledge and influence of the Project. Recently we have met with Satvider Goraya, the New Communities and Migration Officer at Wolverhampton City Council and team members of the Walsall For All partnership.