**Migrant Help Modern Slavery Victim Care (MSVC) Art Exhibition at the Old Music Hall – The Start of a Tradition?**

2023-2024 was the 60th Anniversary of Migrant Help and in December 2023 a fundraising competition was launched as part of Migrant Help’s 60th Anniversary celebrations. The best team effort would be recognised at the staff conferences in Marc 2024h.

At that same moment we’d already been conversing as a team about all of our creative interests, sharing photos of various artworks we’d all produced. In that moment it was clear that we should raise money through an art exhibition!

Soon we had perfected our pitch as follows:

**Migrant Help 60th Anniversary Art Exhibition and Auction**

Join us to celebrate 60 Years of Migrant Help and fundraise to help empower those who use our services.

**When:** Thursday 22nd February between 12 noon and 6pm
**Where:** Oxford Office
**Donations:** <https://www.justgiving.com/page/60thanniversaryofmigranthelp>

The event is to exhibit and celebrate the artistic talents of our staff and clients. While client art will only be exhibited, there will also be an auction of staff art to raise money for Migrant Help’s crisis fund, for essentials like clothing or to meet wellbeing needs.

Art in its many forms is often sidelined as a human need, yet the pursuit of art is sometimes the only thing that helps improve the wellbeing of our clients and enables them to cope with the traumatic experiences they have been through. It also provides a therapeutic outlet for staff, many of whom risk burnout, dealing with their client’s traumatic experiences.

As well as celebrating staff and client’s talents, this event celebrates the power of art and how it has helped clients and staff alike, channelling it into raising money to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable, so they too have the means to pursue the things they love, like art.

If you would like to support the event and its cause, you can join us on the day, in person or virtually. You will learn about the work we do, view artwork, and even bid in our auction [**here**](https://forms.office.com/e/mFuk9MnYLQ)! If you can’t attend, a simple donation would be warmly welcomed at our Just Giving page included above. We hope you can help us make this a great celebratory event; which is also an opportunity to help prevent further suffering of people who have already faced the unimaginable!

Despite only having a couple of months to plan everything and very little free time. We pressed on with blind optimism. At its core was getting hold of some artwork and we were lucky to end up with 21 pieces (technically around 150 if you counted all the handmade cards) donated for sale from 11 contributors across Migrant Help and beyond. In addition to this we had16 pieces of art from a number of survivors of modern slavery provided for display purposes only.

We then had to find our audience. Migrant Help itself with its hundreds of employees was probably enough, but we wanted to involve partners as well, such as our fellow tenants at the Old Music Hall, and while it was something we got onto probably a bit too late in hindsight, many did indeed attend. Invites even remarkably found themselves to the Clooney’s and Greta Thunberg through a chance encounter on a bus. Unfortunately, neither attended.

Then came the day of the exhibition, and it remarkably came together in the space of a few hours, thanks to the hive like teamwork of the Oxford Modern Slavery Team and a few handy self-adhesive strips, transforming one of the office meeting rooms into a trendy boutique art gallery. Ready just in time for the exhibition to start. We had winged it, but we couldn’t have been more delighted with the result! The photos speak for themselves.

Adding to the beauty of the artwork, were the descriptions we invited contributors to add, which gave the art that extra layer of depth and intrigue, the most poignant of which being for the artwork contributed by survivors, one reading:

*“The photographs are an artistic representation of exploitative situations I repeatedly found myself in while living as an undocumented immigrant in London. Externalising in this way the drudge, dependency, and confinement I experienced, helps me create a distance to these events and to some degree neutralises the pain associated with them.”*

There was additionally one special piece of art contributed by a member of staff, to be exhibited, but not sold, but which would remain in the Oxford Office, a piece entitled *One Hundred and 27 Faces*, the meaning behind which the artist, Mitch O’Donnell described as follows:

*“My idea with this painting was to put as many faces as I could into one space. I thought maybe, if when on a difficult call one could pick a face from the crowd, concentrate on it and in doing that; it could help in some way, kinda like putting a face to the caller. Reminding ourselves about the human being who we are trying to help.*

*I also thought about the number of clients we have and how many more people in need are still out there, we could help if we had the capacity to do so. For example, If the canvas was bigger, I could have fitted more faces into the space and if the organisation we work for expanded we could help more people. More importantly I wanted to show a cross section of the people we currently support which should make all of us proud.”*

Even if the event had raised no money whatsoever, we already felt it had been a success. We’d pulled it off at almost no cost and the reception across the organisation was overwhelmingly positive. It had also been a great team building exercise which also helped toward staff wellbeing. Having said that, we didn’t want it to be a dud and hoped it would raise a respectable amount. In the end we had nearly 50 bids in total from over 20 people, fundraising exactly £1000 (excluding Gift Aid). We did it!

With the event concluded we thought we could relax, but then there was the issue of getting the artwork to its patrons safely and those donated by clients for exhibit, back to home. Just the thought of anything happening to them in between was horrifying. Mission accepted, and like something out of a spy thriller, wanting to avoid the costs and risks of posting the artwork, a series of rendezvous were arranged, and we anxiously awaited confirmation that the packages had been delivered. Mission accomplished!

To top it off, all those involved were recognised for their contributions in the March Migrant Help staff conferences and riding the high from the event, we’re now looking to make the art exhibition a yearly event, having already had survivors and staff a like wanting to contribute. So, if you have any art you’d like to contribute, or some creative friends who may be interested, please do let us know and hopefully we’ll be seeing you at the next Migrant Help art exhibition!