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Lessons in equality

Community-spirited pupils have put into words and pictures the experiences of local refugees.

Under a project launched in May, students at Barrs Hill School and Community College, Radford Road, have undergone six sessions to help them understand the difficulties faced by those in Coventry who have fled persecution.

The scheme, organised by Whitefriars Housing Group, has seen the young people organise a food collection for refugees and meet local groups and refugees who know about the pain racial harassment can cause.

Whitefriars has teamed-up with the Coventry Refugee Centre to run the project. The centre will ensure the food is distributed to local refugees.

The project was led by Joy Warren, Whitefriars' equality and diversity manager. Also heading back to the classroom with her as part of the scheme was Jody Gordon.

Jody, a mum-of-two who lives in Coventry, is responsible for liaising with the different ethnic communities to improve their access to social housing. Her aim is to work with the local communities to identify and overcome barriers of access to social housing in Coventry.

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Following her temporary appointment as Black and Ethnic Minority officer back in 2002, Jody Gordon has worked with more than 30 community groups to raise awareness of the different groups in Coventry.

Jody's post was originally funded by the Coventry Partnership via Neighbourhood Renewal Funding. Her role has now been made permanent by Whitefriars and Jody has taken on a wider remit within the post of equality and diversity officer.

Speaking about the latest project she has helped organise, she said: "The dedication and interest shown by the pupils has been inspirational. A lot of myths exist around refugees, but often people don't bother to find out the facts. There are hundreds of refugees in Coventry who, having fled persecution, are through no fault of their own living hand-to-mouth existences.

"We have been encouraging the students to think about what it is really like to arrive in a foreign country with no money, family or friends. They have really taken that message on board.

"Since the introduction of my job role a few years ago, Whitefriars has made many advances to achieving equality. This new project has a key role to play in that and we are delighted it has gone so well."

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**For further information please contact Michelle Hallmark at The Bridge Group on
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