



## Annual Review 2016-2017

### Welcome to our Annual Review

#### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Overview of the network
- Schools of Sanctuary
- Sanctuary Breaks
- Universities of Sanctuary
- Sanctuary Awards
- Maternity Stream
- Welcome initiatives and activities
- Wales—Building a Nation of Sanctuary
- Places of Sanctuary Ireland
- Scotland
- Asylum Matters
- Sanctuary In Parliament



The review highlights that for us the past 12 months have been as much about partnership working as about responding to the 'revolution of generosity', and the strong public desire to support refugees. This is an opportunity to reflect and celebrate the many examples of people, groups and organisations across the UK coming forward to offer their assistance and welcome to refugees.

At City of Sanctuary we are committed to creating a culture of welcome and hospitality for people fleeing violence and persecution. We continue to play a vital role in setting grassroots integration conversations at the heart of communities; City of Sanctuary is the glue that binds us together as a society to offer the protection and safety

refugees deserve after being uprooted by armed conflicts and other disasters.

When I had the honour to assume the Chair of City of Sanctuary in April 2016, I recognised the need for us to set ambitions of becoming an organisation with a clearer focus and strategic direction; to first and most importantly promote a culture of welcome and hospitality and secondly to work with others to bring about social change for the benefit of people seeking sanctuary.

This year we celebrate our developing partnership with Amnesty, and the hosting of the new Asylum Matters project; we look forward to establishing similar arrangements with other partners to improve the environment for those seeking our protection.

This report shows that a lot of good work is being done to support integration and develop a sense of belonging, but much more is needed; including political will and investment in refugee integration. There is also a great need to improve coordination of efforts, and promote a more integrated approach to welcoming

refugees, which cuts across disciplines and values of the wider refugee movement.

We wouldn't have achieved what we have without the support and goodwill of all our partners, volunteers, staff members and other national and international supporters. On behalf of City of Sanctuary I pay tribute to their efforts and commitment to creating a more welcoming society where refugees flourish, make a greater contribution and can be full members of society. In particular I would like to thank our Chief Officer, Sian Summers-Rees and her team who have worked tirelessly to ensure our network is supported. My final thanks go to our board of trustees, past and present – it has been a pleasure working alongside you all.

Our great work continues. We live in difficult times, with over 65 million people forced to flee their homes. It is now more important than ever before to open our doors to refugees; and we look forward to working with you to offer a warm welcome to those who arrive at our shores.

**Sabir Zazai**  
**Chair**



## Looking back over the last year

Firstly, I would like to start by saying how enormously honoured and proud I am to have been appointed to the position of Chief Officer. It has been quite a whirlwind ten months, both tremendously enjoyable and also challenging. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank all the staff and board of trustees who made me feel so welcome and from whom I have learned so much. My thanks also go to the many individuals from across the network and external partner organisations who have provided me with guidance and encouragement – there are too many to mention by name.

As we look back over the past year I have reflected on another remarkable and challenging year for City of Sanctuary – both for the organisation and the network. This report highlights some of the achievements, and demonstrates the dedication, hard work and tenacity of everyone involved in City of Sanctuary!

The profound interest and support of people who want to help City of Sanctuary realise its vision of welcome

continues to build. Our network of groups, places and streams of sanctuary continues to grow and the diversity of activities, initiatives and projects continue to develop at an incredible pace. There are now nearer to 100 groups (at varying stages of development and with varying structures/forms), and of course groups in non-dispersal area are now commonplace. Whilst this growth and interest offers us endless opportunities, it also presents considerable challenges – the external environment in which we operate is now very different to when City of Sanctuary first started. In response to the challenges we have begun to strengthen the infrastructure of the organisation to ensure that we are better equipped to capitalise on new opportunities. We have enhanced our capacity to some degree, but we fully appreciate that this increase is still insufficient to cope with the growing needs of our network.

As a result of the remarkable growth of the network we have embarked on a period of strategic planning since January 2017. The first stage of this process has resulted in a City of Sanctuary Charter to be presented at our 2017 conference and AGM. The charter re-affirms our vision, mission, values and network principles, it provides clarity but also enables the network to continue to develop in ways that are innovative and flexible in order to

realise our vision of welcome.

The charter also seeks to outline our commitment to support others in building a wider movement in support of people seeking sanctuary. Our board of trustees demonstrated this commitment when they agreed to host the Asylum Matters project, I would like to offer my congratulations to our partners and trustees who have helped to bring this project to fruition, and welcome our new colleagues to our team.

We can all be encouraged that the further development of City of Sanctuary demonstrates continued public society concern for the ongoing refugee crisis, however not everyone has been moved to act. We must do everything in our power to remind people there is still a global refugee crisis. Of course the UK needs to play its part in responding to the refugee crisis, but we must constantly remind ourselves and others, that every day people seeking sanctuary in the UK are being failed. We must be equally concerned about the increase in hate crime incidents and the rise of far right extremism. Together we must therefore continue to do all we can do to support our network and the wider sanctuary movement – and do all that is in our power to address the ongoing problems and challenges.

**Siân Summers-Rees,**  
**Chief Officer**

## The Network

Providing support for our network continues to be the top priority for the organisation. We are continuing to learn from our network about its needs and have started to develop more resources to meet those needs. It is also vital we provide opportunities for the network to learn from one another and share good practice, one example of how we do this is through our 'Learning and Working Together' regional networking events. We now have around 100 groups – plus many individuals supporting streams of sanctuary initiatives as well as partner organisations - all working together to realise the City of Sanctuary vision of welcome.

## Welcome to our new and emerging groups

### Preston City of Sanctuary

Preston City of Sanctuary was launched in February 2017.

Members from a diverse range of community groups, faith groups, City Council leader and mayor attended in one of Preston's most



beautiful buildings to show solidarity with people seeking sanctuary. A

Sanctuary Seeker from Syria gave a moving speech from his perspective about adapting to life in Preston, he said that *'we have been pleased and surprised at the welcome and support we have received from neighbours and the wider community'*.



### Bath City of Sanctuary

A steering group in Bath, which includes representatives from the key refugee agencies from across the city, including Bath Welcomes Refugees, have been spearheading efforts for Bath to be recognised as a City of Sanctuary. The group have been supported in particular, by its neighbours in Bristol. The group is currently looking for people to join and help develop the vision of 'welcome and safety' for sanctuary seekers.

### 'Learning and Working Together'

#### Regional Event in Derby

Our first regional networking event for 2017 was held for City of Sanctuary groups in the Central region on 3rd March. The 'Learning and Working Together' event brought together over 70 people from 19 groups with our partners from Amnesty International UK, Hope not Hate, Asylum Matters, Refugee Week and others to learn together and celebrate best practice.

### More new and emerging groups.....

Central region— Walsall, Cambridge and Norwich. And lots of new energy and enthusiasm in Nottingham!

South East—Colchester, Chichester, East Kent, Sutton and Elmbridge. Lots of developments across London and in Halland, Croydon, Sutton and Elmbridge.

North West—Blackburn, Darwen, Lancaster, Morecambe and Bolton.

North East—Northumberland County of Sanctuary.

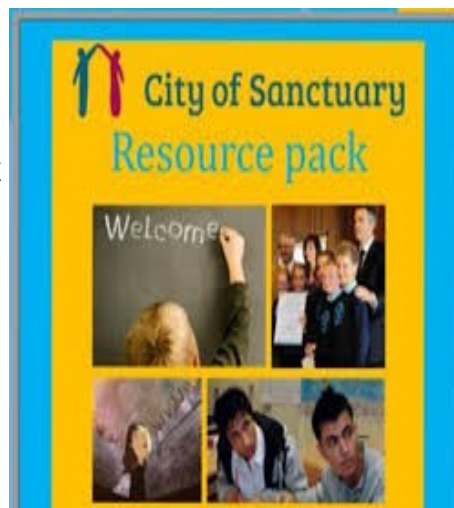
Yorkshire and Humberside—Harrogate District of Sanctuary, Malhamdale, Bentham and Kirkless.

# Schools of Sanctuary

It has been a fantastic year for Schools of Sanctuary! Many groups are involved working with schools right across the UK – both secondary and primary schools.

Some local authorities are also taking the lead in rolling out this fantastic initiative with support from schools improvement services and other departments from within local authorities.

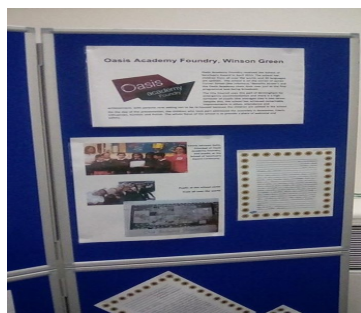
Our thanks go to everyone who has played a part in ensuring that schools are welcoming and inclusive environments.



**Congratulations to all schools who have received recognition for their wonderful work over the past year.**

## Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary network

*Many schools in Birmingham have been working together to share their ideas and provide mutual inspiration and support.*



The Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary network has produced an exhibition which was displayed in the very well-used training room of the Birmingham Pupil and Schools Support Base in the city centre.



*Five schools have received the School of Sanctuary award: St Chad's, Oasis Foundry, St. Vincent's, St Anne's and St Clare's. Other primary schools working towards the awards include Featherstone, Shaw Hill, Welsh House Farm, George Dixon, St Anthony's and St Bernard's. Secondary schools involved are Hillcrest, Erdington Academy, Washwood Heath and Eden Boys'.*



# Norwich City Of Sanctuary



In Norwich, and across Norfolk, a network of schools have committed to becoming more welcoming and inclusive. In June an event recognised the achievements of seven Schools of Sanctuary. Clive Lewis MP for Norwich South

presented the awards and the event included contributions from Norwich City of Sanctuary, The Common Lot theatre company and representatives from the local refugee community as well as performances by pupils from Norfolk schools. The schools recognised were Avenue Junior School, Jane Austen College, Wensum Junior School, Notre Dame High School, Bignold Primary School, Magdalen Gates Primary School and Framingham Earl High School.

We would recommend watching the wonderful film produced by Class 5b from Avenue Junior School film inspired by the Benjamin Zephaniah poem *We Refugees*.



In Plymouth, two schools Coombe Dean Secondary School, and Mount Street Primary School, gained School of Sanctuary recognition. The schools were supported during this process by Plymouth City Council's Ethnic Minority Achievement Team. A big congratulations to these two schools; we also extend our thanks you to the Plymouth Ethnic Minority Achievement Team.



## THE THREE PRINCIPLES TO BEING A SCHOOL OF SANCTUARY:

**Learn** about what it means to be seeking sanctuary.

Take positive action to **embed** concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion within your school and the wider community.

**Share** your vision and achievements – be proud!

# Sanctuary breaks

Many groups in non-dispersal areas, particularly in rural areas, are offering Sanctuary breaks. These breaks are an excellent way of providing welcome through connecting people seeking sanctuary with local people who wish to host them for a short period – a day, a weekend or even a week.

## East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary

East Lindsey have been pioneering Sanctuary Breaks scheme for households to host asylum seekers for short, one-week breaks. With 14 hosts and 85 supporters providing fundraising, friendship, transport and English conversation, East Lindsey have welcomed 24 guests (6 single adults and 7 families) from Iran, Eritrea, the Ivory Coast, Belarus, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Iraq. Hosts offer asylum seekers and refugees from Leeds and Leicester a weekend or week-long break to feel welcome, practice their English, visit award-winning beaches and the award-winning market town, and walk through the beautiful countryside finding peace and restoration. Guests return regularly and the hosts are benefitting immensely from the relationships and are learning much about how the asylum system works in the UK.

One destitute asylum seeker from Zimbabwe said, "I was so happy to meet you and your family. May God bless you and your family for what you are doing for us. I thank you very much for everything xxx."



## Hay, Brecon and Talgarth

In April sixty asylum seekers from Swansea were welcomed to Llangorse; they had a wonderful day with plenty of food on offer, and activities such as football and clay modelling. Llyn Safaddan cubs made a lovely welcome banner and planned donations and activities and Llangorse Church in Wales School made some beautiful and moving welcoming cards.

A picture of the beautiful scenery enjoyed by those on their Sanctuary break in Mid-Wales



Many universities, students and staff, have started to introduce a range of initiatives and changes to make their place of education more accessible and welcoming to people seeking sanctuary - bursaries, fee waivers, access to facilities and clubs, language tandem projects, accommodation and so much more. We have now produced a Universities of Sanctuary Handbook which shows examples of amazing work being done by institutions already, as well as ideas for what could be done and advice. We are receiving a lot of interest from Universities who are in the process of working with their local group, or are considering, applying for Sanctuary Awards in England - including Bradford, Birmingham Wolverhampton, Coventry, Leicester, Northampton, Manchester, Reading and of course we already recognise the fantastic work of the Bradford University Health Faculty.



## Sanctuary Awards

We use Sanctuary Awards to recognise any organisation's commitment to welcoming people seeking sanctuary and celebrating their contributions. The more mainstream organisations / groups/ places/institutions who commit to our shared vision for every place to be one of welcome and safety for all, the more we are contributing to building a wider movement of welcome. Sanctuary Awards are a great strategic tool that encourages celebration, publicity and sustains commitment across an organisation and it is catching on with many groups rolling out Awards Schemes. Any organisation can be recognised for its commitment to learning about what it means to be a sanctuary seeker, embedding welcome into their context as appropriate and sharing their achievements with others to continue the momentum of movement building.



Our Chair, Sabir Zazai, presenting an Award to Thimblemill Library

## The first Library of Sanctuary

The first Library of Sanctuary Award was presented to Thimblemill Library in February. The Thimblemill Library in the Borough of Sandwell is now encouraging the local council to work across all libraries. Libraries are natural places of welcome and can play an important role in the lives of people seeking sanctuary and in the education of the public in general and we hope to extend this work nationally as more library authorities are show an interest.



## The first Theatre Company of Sanctuary

In October Stand and Be Counted Theatre, became the UK's first Theatre Company of Sanctuary. The company are Associate Artists at Cast, Doncaster. In June they will present three projects as part of Migration Matters Festival in Sheffield. 'TANJA,' their most recent touring show is a play and a campaign to end detention, starring Emily Ntshangase-Wood, a former Yarl's Wood detainee and also a City of Sanctuary supporter.



## Maternity Stream

The Maternity Stream continues to work on many different levels in order to highlight the difficulties faced by people seeking sanctuary and to improve the maternity care they receive.

For example this stream seeks to highlight the fact that pregnant asylum seeking and refugee women and their babies are at a much increased risk of death relative to the UK average.

Central to the Maternity Stream's work is the 'Experts by Experience', incredible volunteers, without whom the Maternity Stream would not exist. These amazing women represent the Maternity Stream, giving talks about their personal experiences of Maternity Care.

Locally, the maternity stream work in Bradford and Leeds is building well. In Leeds they are partnering with Baby Week once again, which is a week-long series of events bring statutory and voluntary sector together on anything baby related as well as new families. They will ensure that the voices of people seeking sanctuary are heard and awareness is raised wherever possible. The Bradford Maternity Stream group is also strengthening with more services from across the sectors attending and hosting the quarterly meetings at their venues.

The women volunteers also like to have fun, and the partnership with People in the Dales is integral to that – they have been on three trips since September 2016 (the picture above is from their trip in September).



## Providing support services



As well as the more traditional model of working across places to promote the vision of welcome for people seeking sanctuary, many groups have also become far more conscious of the bigger picture. For example some groups have identified gaps in services for asylum seekers and have harnessed the efforts of volunteer supporters and their resources to develop direct services for people seeking sanctuary.

Leicester City of Sanctuary have around 90 volunteers including asylum seeking volunteers and provide day trips, classes (ESOL, IT, Cooking and Sewing) a shopping buddy scheme, a football team, a New Evidence Search Scheme in conjunction with local university law students as well as a weekly drop-in with social activities and lunch attended by over 100 asylum seekers. They are working in partnership with many local organisations to extend the activities available including the Red Cross, Journeys Festival International, Soft Touch Arts, East Midlands Writing School and Growing Points. Activities have led to published poetry, beautiful prints, photographs and crafts, radio interviews, and the engagement of schools, fire and police services.



# Welcome initiatives and activities

## Local Authority Support

Wolverhampton Council joined the growing numbers of local authorities who have committed to welcome people seeking sanctuary at the end of 2016. Councilors passed a resolution which included a pledge to promote the positive contribution migrants make to the social, cultural and community life of the city. The authority has also agreed to work with regional and national partners to provide a safe home for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

## Destitution

Through its local bus company, First Bus, Bristol City of Sanctuary continues to run The Bristol City of Sanctuary Transport- a community initiative to provide bus tickets for destitute sanctuary seekers and vulnerable refugees (especially women) in Bristol. Every donation made to the destitute fund is match funded by First Bus. A monthly allocation of free bus tickets is distributed through welcome and drop in centres run by other refugee agencies.

Some of our groups have engaged with hosting schemes and some have developed their own – Swindon has set up its own “Room for All” hosting scheme and Derby is working in partnership to develop a project for destitute asylum seekers in Derby.



## Support for re-settled Syrian families

In September 2015 the Government announced an expansion to resettlement, pledging to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. We are proud that many of our groups are actively working in partnership with support agencies to provide welcome within communities across the UK.

Many groups have also successfully campaigned with their local authorities to engage with resettlement schemes.



## Cultural Events

Preston held a cultural evening and dinner event in May to bring people together and welcome people seeking sanctuary. Syrian families brought home made dishes of abundant varieties to feed a crowd of eighty. The enormous buffet was devoured and later guests relaxed to enjoy some poetry and guitar music.

Neath Port Talbot City of Sanctuary used their Guardian funding to hold an event which brought together Syrian families and members of the local community in ‘A Celebration of Welsh & Syrian Culture’.

## Wales—Building a Nation of Sanctuary

In December last year the Sanctuary in the Senedd event brought together around 150 people, including Assembly Members, to listen to powerful refugee testimony on several devolved issues including housing, transport and education. This event coincided with the Equality, Local Governments & Communities Committee inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and all testimony given was filmed to provide video evidence to the inquiry.

The City of Sanctuary UK Chief Officer also gave evidence on behalf of the network in Wales - one of the key messages was that Wales should work towards becoming a Nation of Sanctuary. We are pleased to report that the concept of building a Nation of Sanctuary was taken on board by the inquiry which produced an excellent list of recommendations for the Welsh Government to consider.

In April a conference was held with the objective of determining what the criteria might be for Wales to become a Nation of Sanctuary, and how, between all the groups and individuals across Wales, this could happen. It was a fantastic occasion which enabled many refugee support groups across Wales, both affiliated City of Sanctuary groups and others, to meet, share experiences and learn from each other and hopefully go away enthused. The most recent news is that the Welsh Government has responded to the inquiry report and has accepted all but one of the recommendations – the next steps are to work collaboratively to produce a plan that will make the concept of a Nation of Sanctuary a reality (no pressure then).



# Places of Sanctuary Ireland



Places of Sanctuary Ireland is the name chosen for the organisation as there are not many cities and they wanted to reflect towns, counties, universities and other places where sanctuary is part of the shared identity. The movement is growing fast across Ireland, where as much as possible they work cross border and enjoy a healthy exchange of ideas and practice.

## Highlights from Ireland:

- A very successful and well attended all Ireland conference attended by over 100 from all over the island of Ireland.
- Universities of Sanctuary, with Dublin City University and University of Limerick being recognized as Universities of Sanctuary and several other colleges and universities being inspired to follow suit.
- The Sanctuary in Politics course has emerged from the Dublin and Waterford groups. This course empowers and equips refugees and migrants by introducing them to the way Irish politics and media work, training them in media and public speaking, and breaking down barriers of communication and understanding. The course has been enormously successful.
- Schools of Sanctuary taking off in Northern Ireland with the Education Authority working closely alongside schools and local groups.
- Syrian resettlement schemes are changing the map of where refugees are and opening up more places of sanctuary in Northern Ireland, as well as in the Republic.
- New groups forming in Limerick, Portlaoise, Cork and elsewhere, while Belfast, Dublin and other local groups have grown significantly in strength and impact.



# Scotland

There are several new or forming City of Sanctuary local groups in Scotland including Aberdeen, Dumfries and Galloway and East Lothian. Aberdeen has been launched very successfully while Stirling continues to thrive, and in spite of the vast distances, Scottish groups are keen to learn from each other and communicate.

One highlight has been the recognition of Edinburgh University as Scotland's first University of Sanctuary and other universities keen to follow suit.

Edinburgh City of Sanctuary is one of the groups going from strength to strength; like other places, the arrival of Syrian refugees has provided an impetus to strengthen activities and connections. Edinburgh is hosting the first gathering of sanctuary groups in Scotland in late June.

Scotland has a proud tradition of welcoming and including refugees, and we're confident that there will be much inspiration for the rest of the network as plans and connections unfold.

## Asylum Matters

**City of Sanctuary now hosts Asylum Matters which is an advocacy and campaigns project that works in partnership locally and nationally to improve the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum through social and political change.**

Asylum Matters incorporates and builds on the work of the Still Human Still Here coalition and the Regional Asylum Activism (RAA) Project. The mandate of Asylum Matters will be to secure the goals identified at the Sanctuary Summit in 2014 which have been endorsed by more than 320 organisations as part of the Birmingham Declaration. The project will be independent in setting its objectives and remit but will work very closely with City of

Sanctuary at a local and national level. We are excited by the opportunity to increase support for the network to make real campaigning impact when influencing opportunities arise. Groups will now have access to additional opportunities and resources to engage in advocacy activities to support refugees and asylum seekers and can receive training through their engagement with Asylum Matters staff.

# Sanctuary in Parliament

The flagship Sanctuary in Parliament event took place in November 2016. Sanctuary seekers shared their powerful testimonies and discussed the impact of UK asylum policy with nearly forty MPs and eight peers from across different political parties. As we heard from all of the speakers, people seeking sanctuary in the UK are still encountering huge obstacles in our society and political system. We heard testimony from people seeking sanctuary about the need to help asylum seekers to study while their cases are being decided, and the real challenges people have to face after seeking asylum. Many spoke about the challenges to integration, including language and cultural differences.



The testimonies reiterated the importance of welcome and integration when people come from different countries. We also heard about the failures of the asylum decision making process and the lack of legal aid funding for family reunion. We also heard about the failures of the asylum support system, including the low standard of initial accommodation, the terrible sanitary provision, poor food and severe overcrowding. Our Chair, Sabir recognised the continued *"...need to encourage these stories and ensure our decision makers and the public realise the humanity and compassion that connects us as human beings."*

The event demonstrated that the City of Sanctuary network is thriving in cities, towns, villages and rural areas across the UK. It also highlighted the way that a whole spectrum of other organisations are working together as part of a broader-based sanctuary movement, including the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, STAR, NACCOM, Citizens UK, Amnesty International and many others. The event came to a resounding conclusion with an address from Maurice Wren CEO of the Refugee Council who ended by saying *'our strength is in our unity and our strength is in our diversity.'*

**Our thanks go to Thangam Debbonnaire MP for sponsoring the event, and of course to the planning team for making it happen.**

We have endeavoured to select a cross section of activities, initiatives and groups in this review.

We continue to encourage everyone to use our website to post their inspirational stories of welcome - we want to highlight all the amazing work!

## Trustees

Alan Thomas - <i>Swansea</i>	Kay Polley - <i>Wrexham</i>
Andrew White (Treasurer) - <i>Southampton</i>	Marzia Babakarkhail - <i>Oldham</i>
Betty Nyamwenge - <i>Cardiff</i>	Pam Inder - <i>Leicester</i>
Caroline Beatty - <i>Bristol</i>	Philip Berman - <i>Dublin</i>
Herbert Dirahu - <i>Newcastle</i>	Rodrigo Edema - <i>Sheffield</i>
Jeff Morgan - <i>Manchester</i>	Roger Nyantou - <i>Leeds</i>
Jeni Vine (Secretary) - <i>Sheffield</i>	Sabir Zazai (Chair) - <i>Coventry</i>
John Mellor - <i>Ripon</i>	
Jonathan Ellis (Vice-Chair) - <i>London</i>	
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