



# OUR IMPACT 2023

CITY OF SANCTUARY UK



# OUR REFLECTIONS

As we reflect on the challenges and triumphs of the past year, it becomes clear that the essence of our mission - welcome, compassion, and kindness - resonates more powerfully than ever across Britain.

In the face of formidable obstacles, our networks have grown at an extraordinary rate. The more this government prioritises hostility and division - through the Nationality and Borders Act; the Rwanda policy; or housing people in unsafe barracks and barges - the more people are driven to resist by volunteering, campaigning or speaking up for refugee rights.

A defining moment for us was when our Schools of Sanctuary programme faced an attack by GB News, led by Nigel Farage. The outpouring of support from within our sector, from individuals across the movement, and newfound allies was nothing short of incredible.

With politics so divisive and the far right on the rise, the current landscape is at a critical juncture, with our communities facing the risk of fragmentation.

In response to this pressing need, we have developed and are now implementing a new programme specifically designed to bridge divides and encourage individuals to stand up for refugee rights.

As we navigate these challenging times, our little team of 12 finds solace and inspiration in the resilience of our network and the unwavering support from all corners. This impact report serves as a testament to our shared dedication to creating a more compassionate and inclusive society.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey.

**-Siân Summers-Rees, Chief Officer**



# WE ARE BUILDING A MOVEMENT OF WELCOME

Wherever we come from, we all have a right to feel safe. That's why city by city, community by community, we are building a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.

Since we started our work in 2005, we have been committed to making welcome widespread. Our vast network of local groups provide direct support whilst building welcome within communities. Our work with mainstream organisations like schools, councils, libraries and more ensure that wherever someone seeking sanctuary goes, they are met with understanding, compassion and empowering opportunities. Together, these networks weave a tapestry of support, dignity, and genuine welcome.

From small acts of kindness to big political change, this inclusive movement is building a better, fairer, kinder society - for everyone.

We're there every step of the way. From coordination, training and resources to unmissable webinars and collaboration opportunities, we do all we can to support and grow these networks of welcome.



Photo: 2022 City of Sanctuary UK team at Christmas

# OUR APPROACH



Photo: City of Sanctuary ambassadors Elizabeth, Annie & Omoze

We believe that a UK that truly welcomes refugees is possible. By bringing people together, celebrating our shared humanity and encouraging people to put their compassion into action, we can build strong, welcoming, cohesive communities.

Our networks offer a positive vision of welcome and hospitality to all. We create opportunities for friendship and solidarity between local people and people seeking sanctuary and we encourage partnership on common causes. We promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly.

We celebrate and promote the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary and engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels.

Excitingly, this year we saw growth in our Sanctuary Ambassador network culminating in a successful bid to employ a dedicated Sanctuary Ambassador Coordinator to continue to improve our efforts.



# OUR VALUES

## Inclusivity

We welcome and respect everyone, place the highest value on diversity and are committed to equality.

## Openness

We are committed to a culture of collaboration across our networks and in partnership with others.

## Participation

People seeking sanctuary are involved in all areas and are supported to become leaders in this movement.

## Inspiration

We work with enthusiasm and positivity and are determined to surpass what has already been achieved to create welcome.

## Integrity

We should welcome people, celebrate their contributions and support them to integrate and thrive.

# SANCTUARY AWARDS

We all have a part to play in building a more welcoming, inclusive and compassionate society, and our Sanctuary Awards programme is key in getting more mainstream organisations involved.

These awards celebrate the institutions and organisations who go above and beyond to support and welcome people seeking sanctuary, whilst creating structure and guidance for the organisations still finding their way.

Appraised by a panel including someone with lived experience of seeking sanctuary, an expert in the field and someone from a local community group, each award lasts for 3 years. An institution is then able to apply for reaccreditation.

In 2023, we presented 178 first time awards and reaccreditations, that's a 23% increase on 2022.



Photo: Coventry Libraries with their Sanctuary Award



# OUR IMPACT

**126**

Local City of  
Sanctuary groups.  
8 joined in 2023

**35**

Universities of  
Sanctuary.  
7 awarded in  
2023

**20**

Colleges of  
Sanctuary.  
9 awarded in 2023

**417**

Schools of  
Sanctuary.  
137 awarded in  
2023

**19**

Faith of Sanctuary  
awards. 15 awarded  
in 2023

**41**

Arts Organisations  
of Sanctuary.  
10 awarded in 2023

**22**

Library Services of  
Sanctuary. 8  
awarded in 2023

**158**

Local Authorities  
engaged in 2022.  
56 in the network  
and 12 awarded

**7**

Garden and Green  
Spaces of  
Sanctuary awards

**9**

Health, Mental  
Health &  
Wellbeing and  
Maternity Awards

**3865**

People registered  
to attend 55 of  
our webinars and  
online events in  
2023

# LOCAL GROUPS



Photo: Hastings Community of Sanctuary

There are now 126 local groups across the UK, from large cities like Sheffield and Manchester to small rural locations like East Hoathly and Halland Village of Sanctuary. 8 new groups started in 2023, a 67% increase in new groups vs 2022.

In light of events in both Afghanistan and Ukraine, and the government's increasingly hostile approach to refugees, our groups have stepped up like never before. Whether it's arranging distributions of vital supplies, getting involved with community sponsorship, supporting those housed in hotels, promoting welcome and inclusion, raising awareness in schools or campaigning for political change - our local groups do everything possible to stand in solidarity with people forced to flee their homes.

Groups go beyond what they themselves can do to help people seeking sanctuary. They act as a rallying cry to other organisations and individuals in an area to offer sanctuary and welcome.

See a full list of City of Sanctuary groups [here](#).



# CASE STUDY: CALDERDALE

Calderdale Valley of Sanctuary's mission extends beyond providing basic assistance to refugees and people seeking asylum.

This team's work is rooted in partnership - working with local businesses, community groups and more. Their 150 strong membership works with local schools, arts organisations and more to ensure they're places of welcome. This is alongside facilitating people seeking sanctuary to get involved with fulfilling activities, from cooking to gardening.

This year, Calderdale worked with a local videographer to develop a training programme to equip people seeking sanctuary with storyboarding, interviewing, filming and editing skills. Step-by-step, the trainees put their learning into practice to produce a short film – 'I am skillful, I am talented' – platforming stories from the community and showcasing the many skills people seeking asylum in Calderdale have to offer.



Photo: Calderdale



# LOCAL AUTHORITY NETWORK

This year saw unprecedented growth and interest in our Local Authority Network. A total of 56 local councils are now formally within the Local Authority network, and overall we are engaged with 158, including an incredible 28 out of 32 London Boroughs.

68 councils have now passed motions committing themselves to work with us to build inclusion and welcome within their policy and practice - 23 of these were passed in 2023.

There are now 12 fully awarded Local Authorities: Lewisham, Bradford, Lambeth, Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Salford, Sevenoaks, Greenwich, Sandwell, Islington and Waltham Forest.

This year we were delighted to receive funding from the Lloyds Bank Foundation to support our work with local authorities from 2024-2027.



Photo: Greenwich Borough of Sanctuary group



# UNIVERSITIES OF SANCTUARY



Photo: University of Sanctuary conference

Across the UK there are now over 60 universities who either have the University of Sanctuary award or are working towards it. That's well over a third of all UK universities. 35 have been formally recognised as Universities of Sanctuary - 7 of which were awarded in 2023 with a further 3 being re-accredited.

There are also now 88 universities with Sanctuary Scholarships – that's over half of all UK universities offering fully funded places to hundreds of students from a forced displacement background.

This year our Universities Annual Conference was attended by a record 300 people, and we co-organised four Scholarship Networking events for 100+ university staff.

We are proud to have partnered with the Scottish Refugee Council to develop a training programme for Institutions wanting to apply for the award - to date, five universities have benefited from this training.

# SCHOOLS OF SANCTUARY

This year has seen huge growth in our schools network. There are now 417 awarded schools, with another 393 working towards recognition. 92 awards and 3 re-accreditations were given in 2023.

This year our schools work was recognised globally as one of 29 'Promising Practices' in Refugee Education.

Schools of Sanctuary is being actively delivered in 50+ areas across the UK by our team of local leads. Each lead is trained, advised and supported by us. Where we don't have a lead, we support the school directly - we're currently supporting 61. In 2023, we organised 4 events, officially partnered with Anglia-Ruskin Uni, established a national working group for organisations working in refugee education and spoke at a migrant girls' education event in the House of Commons. Our schools network also led the push back against the government's decision to paint over murals in reception centres, receiving widespread media attention.

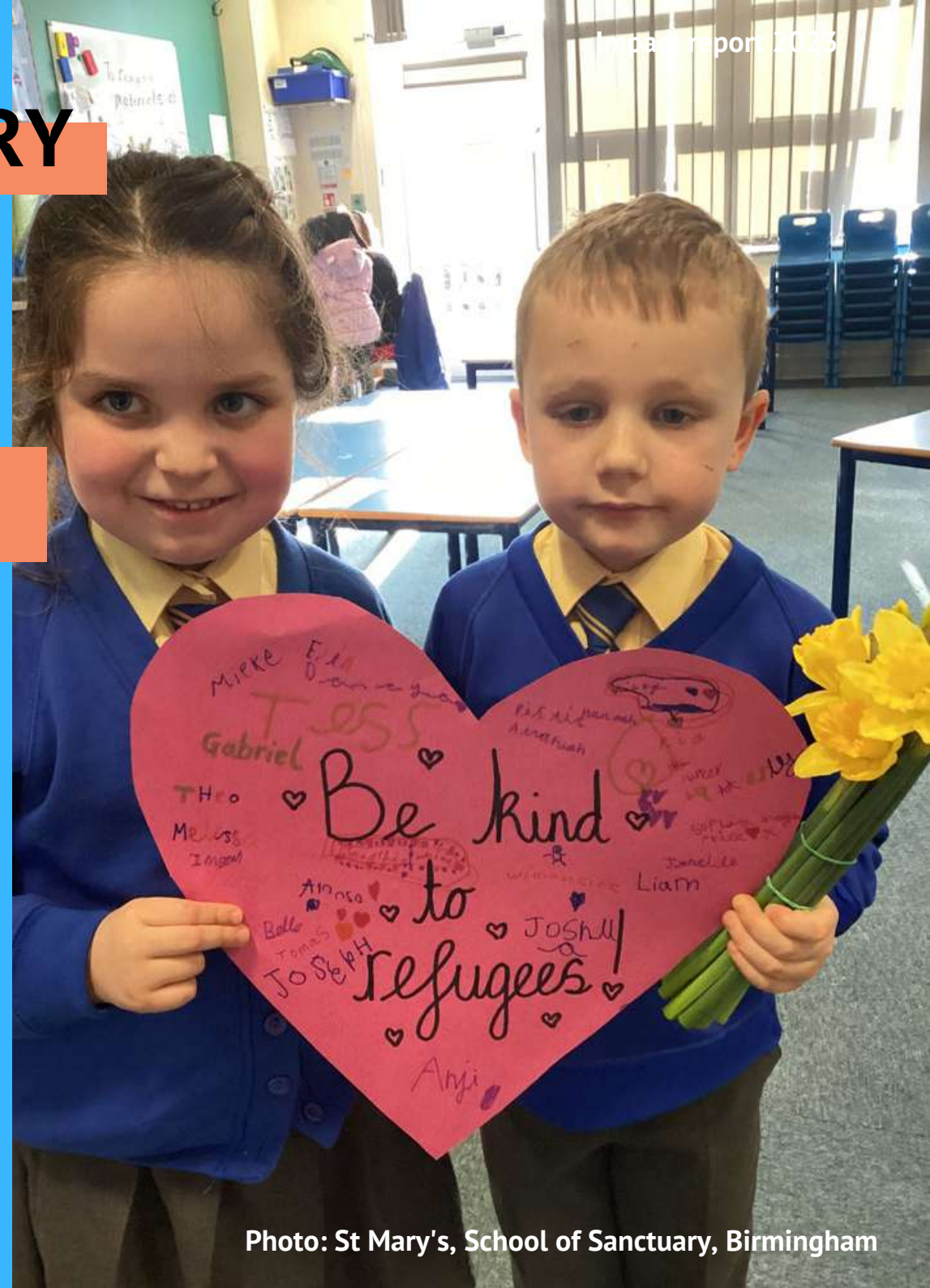


Photo: St Mary's, School of Sanctuary, Birmingham



# CASE STUDY: AVENUE JUNIOR SCHOOL



Avenue Junior School became a School of Sanctuary in 2016, and was reaccredited again in 2021.

With the war in Ukraine, the crisis in Afghanistan and multiple emergencies around the world, the number of forcibly displaced children has grown, so this school is doing all it can to ensure it is a place of welcome for all.

From employing classroom assistants with lived experience of seeking asylum and 1-1 support for refugee students, to all students learning about their region's history as a place of sanctuary and bright murals celebrating diversity around the playground, Avenue Junior leads the way in how schools can foster holistic support both within the school grounds and the wider community.

Working with Anglia Ruskin University, a teacher at this school has also founded 'A Day of Welcome' which is held each June ahead of Refugee Week with events for teachers, schools, parents, and children

# ARTS NETWORK OF SANCTUARY

This year the number of awarded arts organisations has grown by a third. From platforming playwrights from a refugee background to making galleries accessible and inviting to everyone, our arts network is reaching across divides and platforming the voices that urgently need to be heard

10 new institutions achieved an award or reaccreditation this year. There are now 42 formally recognised arts organisations, including 27 theatres and theatre companies, 5 museums, 3 festivals, 4 art galleries, a Choir, Magazine and Cinema of Sanctuary.

We were delighted to welcome the Migration Museum, the Birmingham Rep, Tara Theatre, Mercury Theatre, Rank and File Theatre, the Whitworth Gallery and Mafwa Theatre, who all achieved awards in 2023.

Over the year we ran 3 info sessions for arts organisations and supported over 30 institutions to start their journeys to becoming a place of sanctuary.



Photo: SBC Theatre Company of Sanctuary



# LIBRARIES OF SANCTUARY

From taking mobile libraries to asylum accommodation and stocking books in different languages to hosting ESOL classes, signposting support services and offering free IT subscriptions, libraries often offer the first warm welcome a new arrival receives.

There are now 22 awarded Library Services of Sanctuary - in total that's almost 400 libraries around the UK who are recognised by the award.

7 of these awards were given in 2023, resulting in almost 200 additional libraries, including Essex Libraries which is the second largest service in the UK with 74 branches.

Over the year we ran 3 info sessions for libraries and supported over 20 to start their journeys to becoming a place of sanctuary.



Photo: Hampshire Library Services



# MATERNITY AND HEALTH

Our Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing project has seen an ongoing collaboration with The Mental Health Foundation, leading to several Sanctuary Ambassadors trained as peer-to-peer wellbeing support leaders.

We are very proud that one health organisation has obtained the award and 9 others, including NHS trusts, are working towards it.

There are 8 awarded maternity organisations, including The Birth Partner Project in Cardiff, the first organisation in Wales to receive the award. We currently have 8 more organisations working towards the award.

In 2023 we were part of a joint campaign to scrap the 72-hour limit on the detention of pregnant women which was successful; and our maternity lead presented at the British Sociological Association reproduction conference and the Maternal Mental Health Alliance Amplifying Maternal Voices conference.



Photo: Amma Birth Companions in Glasgow



# SPORT

Sport is an international language. Its power extends beyond the field - by facilitating engagement in community sports, we actively contribute to breaking down stereotypes and fostering a sense of inclusion.

In the past year we have held a one day workshop in partnership with the University of Nottingham to develop the Football Club of Sanctuary award process. Representatives from seven professional football clubs attended. Subsequently, Newcastle United and Rochdale AFC became the first professional football clubs to be awarded Football Club of Sanctuary status and Holbeck Moor FC the first women's team to become a Football Club of Sanctuary. Blackburn Rovers have subsequently begun the process of working towards an award and FC Fylde have signed the pledge.



Photo: Rochdale Football Club



# FAITHS

**City of Sanctuary is made up of people from all faiths and none.**

**The concepts of Sanctuary and Hospitality are thousands of years old and they are evident in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, the Baha'i Faith, Sikhism and in Hinduism.**

**Across our network, many different faith groups support the City of Sanctuary movement and welcome people seeking sanctuary, often providing significant practical support that makes a real difference to their lives.**

**There are now 18 Faith Sanctuary Awards, including churches, cathedrals, mosques and more, of which 15 were given in 2023.**

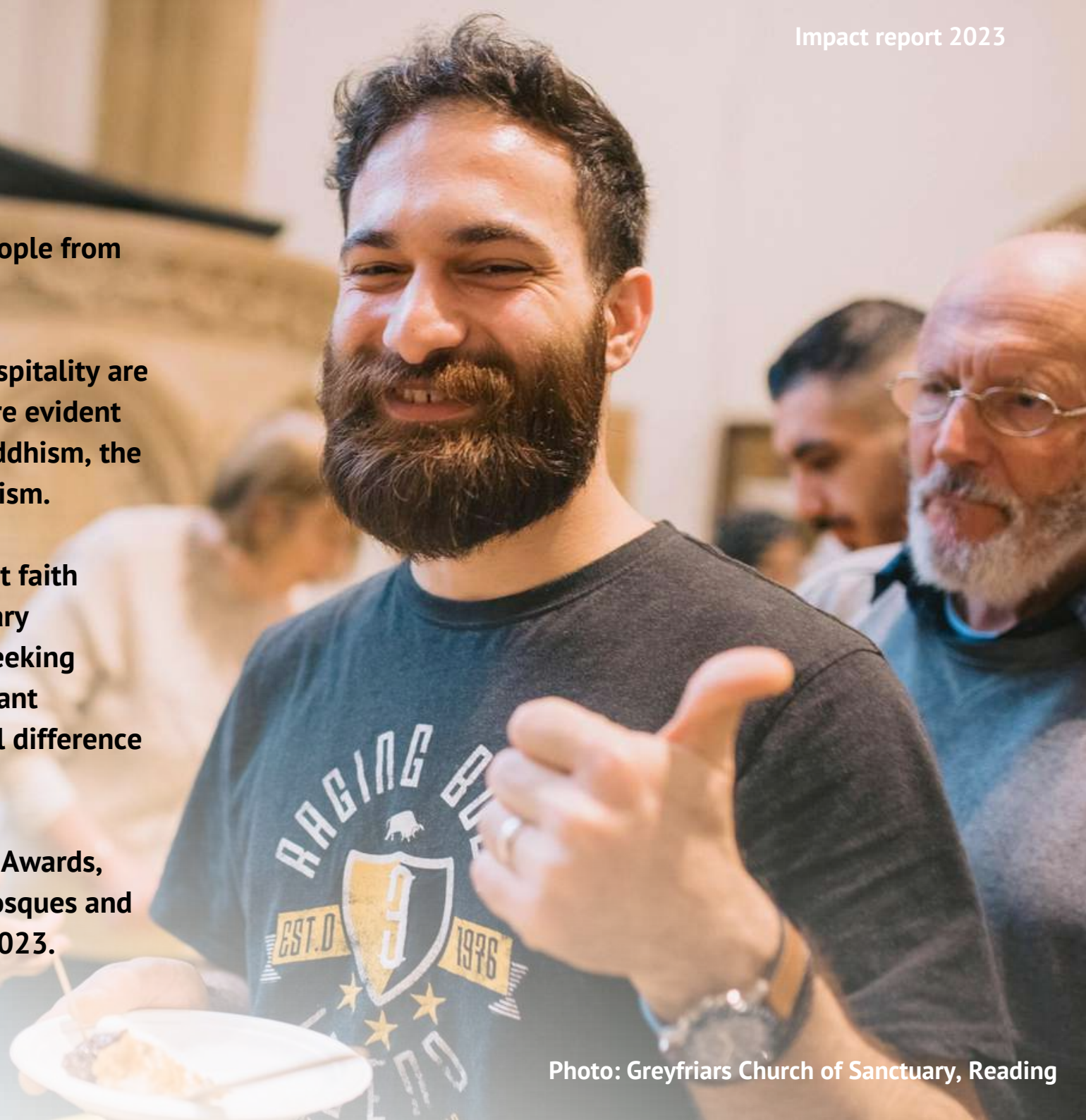


Photo: Greyfriars Church of Sanctuary, Reading



# WALES



## Wales, Nation of Sanctuary.

There are 8 active groups in Wales and we are supporting 1 other to re-establish. We are delighted that there are also now 40 awarded institutions and organisations in Wales, including 30 Schools of Sanctuary - 15 of these were awarded in 2023. A further 74 schools are working towards the award - these new schools are in part down to our ongoing partnership with the Church in Wales.

In November we ran a Sanctuary in Politics course in Swansea - 15 participants took part along with 10 mentors to support the participants in their final project. These participants were also given the opportunity to take part in Sanctuary in the Senedd where they delivered impactful speeches on key issues that have affected the lives of people seeking sanctuary and outlined tangible asks to members of the Senedd in the hope to feed into the Nation of Sanctuary plan.

In response to Welsh Government's announcement to refresh the Nation of Sanctuary action plan, our Wales Coordinator has joined a working group to ensure that Sanctuary Ambassadors voices are included.



# SCOTLAND

Whinhill Primary School in Inverclyde became the second School of Sanctuary in Scotland. With the help of their Gaelic education lead, we now have a Schools of Sanctuary Award logo in Scots Gaelic! Several more schools are hoping to follow suit in 2024. Two Colleges are in the Award process, as are two Local Authorities.

2023 was also a year of development and growth for the Edinburgh City of Sanctuary group, who launched their monthly vigils in from the Home Office building in Edinburgh, protesting against punitive immigration policies and raising voices for a positive future.



Lochardil Primary School, Inverness

# NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast City of Sanctuary group continues to be a key organisation in speaking up for people seeking sanctuary in Northern Ireland. They work closely with the Education Authority of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council, delivering awards for schools, colleges and others. Two further councils in Northern Ireland are engaging with our Local Authorities Network.

In September, Ormeau Library in Belfast became the first Library of Sanctuary in Northern Ireland. In 2023, 8 nurseries and 1 school obtained the School of Sanctuary award, and a further 12 have started the process.



Academy Nursery School, Derry



# SANCTUARY AMBASSADOR NETWORK



Photo: Sanctuary in Politics graduation

Sanctuary in Politics is an innovative learning course developed to empower and inform people seeking sanctuary about how the UK political system works, campaigning techniques and how to work with the media effectively. Graduates of the course are encouraged to then become Sanctuary Ambassadors. In 2023 we ran two courses, one in Wales focusing on UK politics and migrant rights and one in London looking at climate justice.

We now have 51 ambassadors who support our Sanctuary Awards programme and partner campaigns, as well as guiding our organisational direction, strategy and communications work.

This year saw our ambassadors representing us as Refugee Week Ambassadors and undertaking social media take-overs and interviews on national and local media. Two Sanctuary Ambassadors published collections of poetry, one of which is raising funds to support our networks.



# SPEAKING UP FOR SANCTUARY

This year saw the The Nationality and Borders Act come into force - one of the largest roll back of refugee rights that this country has ever seen. It has never before been so important to stand up for sanctuary, and to encourage others to do the same.

In response, we designed and launched Speak Up for Sanctuary, a new programme designed to support people who may have little or no previous campaigning experience to recognise their power in making change, to speak up for refugee rights and to supercharge efforts to build welcoming and compassionate communities - because real democracy is about getting out there, standing up for what you believe in and speaking up for the values that you live by.

Our Theory of Change is built around the idea that if people have the chance to come together and recognise their shared humanity, they are then more likely to stand up for each other's rights. Compassion turns to action. This programme super charges that idea. In 2023 we delivered the programme three times with over 400 attendees.

Photo: SBC Theatre Company of Sanctuary



# SPREADING LOVE: MERCH

We are very excited to now offer a range of merchandise including t-shirts, hoodies, jumpers, tote bags, kids clothes, art prints and mugs.

We use organic materials that are better for the environment, renewable energy powers production and items are printed to order to reduce waste. Best of all, every penny of profit generated from our sales goes towards building this movement of welcome.

Buying our merch is a powerful catalyst for positive change, and wearing it makes you an ambassador for our cause. [Explore the collection.](#)

In 2023, we sold 120 items, with each order averaging at £32. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each supporter who has become an integral part of our journey towards a more welcoming and compassionate UK.



Photo: Sanctuary Ambassador Comfort modelling merch



# JOIN THE MOVEMENT

It's on all of us to start to build the world we want to see - a world of justice and love, for everyone. Whether it's volunteering, campaigning, raising awareness or fundraising, we all have a part to play.

- 1. Volunteer**  
From teaching English to serving soup, there are many ways to support your local group or stream.
- 2. Donate**  
Even a small donation will go a long way in growing these networks of welcome.
- 3. Get up to date**  
Sign up to our newsletter and follow us on social media.
- 4. Campaign**  
Join your local group and get expert help to mobilise behind refugee rights campaigns.



Photo: Sevenoaks Council, the first Town of Sanctuary, June 2023




# THANK YOU!

Our little team would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all our supporters who have chipped into our fundraisers, bought our merch and help us plan for the future through monthly direct debits. We would like to say a very special thank you to the following charitable funds and trusts - without your support, we simply would not have been able to achieve all the incredible things listed in this impact report. Thank you!





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