



City of Sanctuary

SHOPS OF SANCTUARY

Resource Pack



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Welcome to the Shops of Sanctuary Stream!

This publication contains information and resources about how your charity shop can become a Shop of Sanctuary and join a movement to build inclusive, welcoming communities. It outlines the broader movement of welcome, the role of City of Sanctuary UK and the associates Streams of Sanctuary. It then explains the importance of Shops of Sanctuary and the benefit for both interested shops, people who are seeking sanctuary & local communities. Finally, the steps to become a Shop of Sanctuary are outlined with suggestions of activities and reflections you should consider taking.

We hope this booklet proves useful and we would be thrilled to welcome you to the movement of welcome in the UK.



ABOUT CITY OF SANCTUARY UK

What is City of Sanctuary?

City of Sanctuary is a network of grassroots community groups supporting the movement for welcome and inclusion in the UK. We promote understanding, recognition, and celebration of the many ways in which people seeking sanctuary enrich UK society.

The City of Sanctuary vision began in October 2005 in Sheffield. Since then, over 120 City of Sanctuary groups have been established by local people in towns and cities across the UK. City of Sanctuary UK (CoS UK) is an umbrella organisation with a small national team supporting the CoS groups across the network. Our objectives, vision and values are outlined in our [charter](#) which all groups sign up when they join the CoS network.

What does City of Sanctuary do?

CoS is a movement building a culture of welcome for people seeking sanctuary. We work through partnerships with other organisations and by supporting advocacy and campaigning initiatives. The individual CoS groups do a wide range of activities, depending on their local context and who in their community may be seeking sanctuary, but all groups are dedicated to promoting welcome in their communities.

Activities undertaken by CoS groups can include befriending or hosting schemes, running drop-in services, providing English tuition, raising awareness, and campaigning to improve the conditions faced by people seeking sanctuary in the UK. Some CoS groups also work to gain support from local community organisations, such as charities, churches, and local authorities through the form of pledges and Sanctuary Awards to recognise good practices and examples of welcome.



THE GLOBAL PICTURE

Over the last few years, images of men, women and children fleeing war zones and making dangerous and often fatal sea and land crossings have become tragically familiar. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), currently over 79.5 million people, more than the entire population of the UK, are currently living forcibly displaced from their homes. The vast majority are internally displaced within their own countries or living in neighbouring countries - very few actually travel to Europe or the UK to seek sanctuary.

Contrary to the media headlines, the UK is not the most popular destination in Europe for those seeking asylum. In the year ending June 2020, there were 32,423 asylum applications made in the UK; during the same period, Germany received 115,435 asylum applications. The number of asylum applications in the UK equates to a tiny fraction of non-EEA nationals arriving into the country.

The UK asylum system is deliberately hostile with thousands of people waiting months, or even years, for a decision and just 41% of initial asylum applications being granted in the year to December 2020.

The quality of decision making done by the Home Office on cases is often poor, with many refugees having to rely on the courts to award protection following an appeal of the Government's initial decision. the proportion of asylum appeals allowed in the year to December 2020 was 39%. [1]



[1] This information came from the Refugee Council website:
<https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/the-truth-about-asylum/>

Why do people seeking sanctuary come here to the UK?

People seeking sanctuary leave their own countries very reluctantly. They are forced to flee – often in a hurry – because of danger due to things like war, persecution, human-rights abuses, and violence. As Ali Saeed, an Ethiopian refugee explains – *“being a refugee is not a choice. No one chooses to be a refugee”*.

Some refugees arrive into the UK as part of the government's resettlement programme, having been identified by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme was launched in 2016, with the aim to resettle some 20,000 people into the UK; this programme recently has been extended past 2020 and includes other nationalities [2] Other people seeking sanctuary arrive into the UK on their own and claim asylum once they arrive onto UK territory.

Some arrive on visas (such as a student or tourist visa) but then claim asylum once in the UK, often due to the situation in their country changing and it becoming too dangerous for them to return home..

The reasons most cited by those seeking asylum in the UK, as opposed to other European countries, is because they have family, friends in the UK, or know there exist strong communities from their countries of origin here in the UK. Knowledge of English, historical and cultural links between the UK and their country of origin also influence the decision-making of people seeking sanctuary to claim asylum here..



[2] <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/refugee-council-responds-to-refugee-resettlement-announcement/>.

What is the difference between refugees, asylum-seekers and people seeking sanctuary?

Under international law, every individual has the right to claim asylum and governments are obliged to provide protection for people who meet the criteria for asylum. As soon as someone arrives in the UK, they can claim asylum. If their application is successful, they are granted asylum and become a refugee. While persons are waiting for a decision on an asylum, they remain asylum-seekers. In UK law, refugees and asylum seekers have different rights and receive varying levels of public support.



Within CoS, the term “person/people seeking sanctuary” is used to refer to all persons who have fled war, violence and persecution and come to the UK in search of safety. CoS does not make distinctions between people on the basis of their legal status in the UK. However, given the different rights afforded to people dependent on whether they are defined by the UK government as a refugee or asylum seeker, it is important for people working with all people seeking sanctuary to understand the different terms.

How can charity shops & volunteers learn more about people seeking sanctuary & the international situation?

To understand better their situation and the global context, Charity shop staff and volunteers can visit the City of Sanctuary (www.cityofsanctuary.org) website. Other useful resources are listed below.

Statistics, Tools & Useful Guides:

- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has detailed information and statistics on asylum in the UK at <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/asylum-in-the-uk.html>
- The Refugee Council publishes regular briefings on UK asylum statistics at <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/>
- Refugee Week happens every year in June and there are lots of resources and ideas on how to celebrate the annual event at www.refugeeweek.org.uk
- Right to Remain has developed a guide to the UK immigration and asylum system. It gives an overview of the legal system and procedures and can be found here: <https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit>

Opportunities to learn more

- The Guardian produced a 360-degree virtual reality video about what the asylum process is like available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jul/05/limbo-a-virtual-experience-of-waiting-for-asylum-360-video>
- The City of Sanctuary Mental Health resource pack is a fantastic resource designed to offer a detailed understanding of the circumstances of sanctuary seekers' lives and how these circumstances can affect their well-being: <https://cityofsanctuary.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CoS-Mental-Health-Resource-Pack-digital.pdf>
- Future Learn periodically offers various courses on working and volunteering with sanctuary seekers. You can learn more here: <https://www.futurelearn.com/>
- Artist and activist Ai Weiwei's film "Human Flow", gives a powerful visual expression to the global refugee crisis, and is available at: <https://www.humanflow.com/>

THE ROLE OF SHOPS

Why should Charity Shops seek to engage in the Shops of Sanctuary stream sanctuary?

Charity shops can help both people seeking sanctuary gain skills, while making a difference in the wider community, fostering empathy & cohesion.

Encouraging volunteering by people who are seeking sanctuary

By coming to help in charity shops, people seeking sanctuary can:

- improve their English, which is the key to their independence in the UK
- gain experience and learn new skills
- mix with people and make friends
- share their own experience and skills
- get a reference which they can show to potential employers in future

Encouraging a culture of welcome in the community

CoS UK's goal is that local shops won't just welcome people seeking sanctuary, but that they will encourage that same welcome in the wider community – through activities, events, and the sharing of positive stories. Wherever people seeking sanctuary go, CoS UK want them to feel safe and find people who will welcome them.



What are the rules around volunteering & employment for refugees & asylum-seekers?

Working: Refugees have permission to work in the UK, but asylum-seekers are not allowed to work. Working while waiting for an asylum claim to be decided can seriously jeopardise an asylum seeker's case – and it is very important that asylum seekers understand that they cannot be in paid employment.

Volunteering: Refugees can volunteer anywhere. The government allows asylum-seekers to volunteer for charities/public-sector organisations like charity shops.

Key to ensuring that an asylum seeker remains compliant with the law is that any volunteering undertaken is not a substitute for employment. As most roles within charity shops are undertaken by volunteers, this setting provides a great opportunity for all people seeking sanctuary to gain experience and skills – and does not threaten an asylum seeker's case.

The full guidance from the Home Office on volunteering and employment for asylum seekers can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/803596/permission-to-work-v8.0-ext.pdf



How can charity shops help CoS spread welcome and support to sanctuary seekers?

Shops can:

- Provide volunteering opportunities for refugees and asylum-seekers
- Display information about local refugee support services
- Raise public awareness about the experiences and issues facing people seeking sanctuary in the UK & in their hometown
- Provide a welcoming space for everyone in the community
- Support local City of Sanctuary groups' objectives, activities, and events
- Organise their own events and publicity in the shop premises about asylum and refugee issues
- Participate in joint events with local City of Sanctuary groups
- Participate in the national annual Refugee Week celebrations

Who benefits ?

- Charity shop staff benefit by learning more about asylum issues and helping to build local awareness, understanding and welcome.
- The local community benefits through increased engagement with people seeking sanctuary and fostering community cohesion.
- People seeking sanctuary can gain valuable experience volunteering.
- People seeking sanctuary can be sure of a welcome/assistance when shopping in-store.
- CoS groups extend local welcome.

"I have been a volunteer at a charity shop for five months. When I volunteer here, I like it here because it's very important to me, for language (learning), for listening, for speaking with customers"

Syrian Refugee Volunteer –
Ripon Oxfam Shop

What should Charity Shops keep in mind when welcoming sanctuary seekers as volunteers?

People seeking sanctuary face a large number of challenges to establishing themselves in the UK.

It can feel frightening and disorienting to arrive and begin living in a new country, even if you feel physically safe for the first time. People seeking sanctuary may have experienced serious trauma before, during and after their flight from their country of origin.

Many people seeking sanctuary have been at the mercy of agents and people traffickers who arrange their transport, often in dangerous and overcrowded conditions.

People seeking sanctuary may:

- miss their own home, their country, and their culture
- miss family members and friends they left behind
- feel they have lost their identity, because no one knows their history and because, initially, they are not independent
- feel a sense of isolation and even confusion, because of language and culture differences
- have few opportunities to mix with people, and can become very lonely
- struggle to make ends meet or have difficulty meeting their most basic needs; some even become destitute
- encounter hostility or racism, or even hate crimes.



The impact of the UK's "Hostile Environment"

Asylum-seekers may feel additionally stressed because they are waiting to find out whether they can be granted asylum and permission to stay in the UK, or whether they must go back to their own country – potentially facing imprisonment or violence. This waiting period can last for years and can make people feel very worried and unsettled as they wonder whether how/when/if they will be permitted to remain. In addition, the UK is the only country in Europe where the authorities permits unlimited detention for immigration reasons.

City of Sanctuary has produced a [Mental Health resource pack](#) which provides lots of information to assist those supporting sanctuary seekers – see the Resources section for more information.



How do I find the nearest CoS group for my shop?

Check the CoS website at <https://cityofsanctuary.org/groups>. You can also contact the appropriate CoS Regional Coordinator for help and assistance in locating the nearest group. While there are CoS groups in nearly every corner of the UK, there may be places where there is not a local group capable of supporting a shop. In that instance, please contact CoS UK at info@cityofsanctuary.org to review how to best collaborate.

BECOMING A SHOP OF SANCTUARY

What are CoS Sanctuary Awards?

City of Sanctuary UK and local CoS groups use Sanctuary Awards to recognise and celebrate organisations' commitment to our values and vision of welcome and inclusivity.

Any community group, private organisation, public sector service or other bodies which demonstrates a commitment towards the vision of welcome can apply for the award. To receive an award, organisations must show how they are using the following processes:



Learn- Embed - Share

Learn: find out what it means to be seeking sanctuary; and be actively involved in awareness raising.

Embed: take positive action to make welcome and inclusion part of the values of your organisation or community, to support sanctuary seekers, and to include them in your activities.

Share your vision and achievements: let others know about the positive contribution sanctuary seekers make to our society and the benefits of a welcoming culture to everyone.

How can a charity shop work towards the sanctuary award?

If a charity shop gets involved in promoting welcome and is interested in pursuing a sanctuary award, a shop can undertake the following steps:

1) **Sign** an organisational pledge of support and post it on a shop display and join the CoS national newsletter mailing list.



2) **Get in contact** with their nearest local City of Sanctuary group or Regional Coordinator to learn more about the process and to see what partnering and support activities can be developed.



3) **Undertake** at least two activities under each of the Learn, Embed & Share processes in the assessment tool below to ensure that the minimum criteria have been achieved.



4) **Submit** the completed assessment tool evidencing how the shop has met the minimum criteria to the nearest CoS group and/or CoS UK.



5) **Celebrate** the award through an event (in-person or virtual) and local and national media outreach.

What are the minimum qualifications for a charity shop to get a Sanctuary Award?

To receive a Sanctuary Award, charity shops must show that they have met the minimum criteria for each of the key processes of Learn, Embed and Share. Specifically, Shops of Sanctuary should demonstrate that they have achieved the following three criteria:

Learn

- Training and learning opportunities are provided for shop staff & volunteers on refugee, asylum, and sanctuary issues.

Embed

- Shop management includes refugee and asylum issues in its regular operations such as volunteer inductions and staff trainings.

Share

- A shop's welcoming activities are shared in store displays, signage or on social media or via public events

How can a shop implement learning, embedding & sharing?

The assessment tool outlines an array of possible activities for each of the three processes to provide inspiration for action by shops. CoS welcomes creativity and originality from applicants – so charity shops should not consider these the only means by which they can demonstrate how they embody welcome. The specific activities listed can be supplemented and modified, but in general all shops should be able to show that they have met the three minimum criteria by completing two representative activities under each criterion.

Once a store has completed the assessment tool, and met the criteria, this can be shared with the local CoS group and/or the relevant CoS UK regional coordinator

Can shops become Shops of Sanctuary even if they do not have sanctuary seekers in their local community?

Yes!

We appreciate that there are many communities across the UK which may not have people seeking sanctuary present, but which still can, and do, demonstrate welcome. We would measure any Shop's capacity to implement activities along the Learn, Embed & Share processes, and provided they meet the minimum qualifications, they would be able to receive an award in recognition of their achievements. Wherever possible, we hope charity shops will endeavour to involve people seeking sanctuary in the Shop and delivery of your sanctuary activities – but appreciate this may not be realistic in all parts of the UK.



SHOPS OF SANCTUARY

ASSESSMENT TOOL

PROCESS: LEARN

Criteria: Training and learning opportunities are provided for shop staff & volunteers on refugee, asylum, and migration issues
Shops need to demonstrate that they have completed two of the following activities to meet the overall LEARN criteria.

	Evidence	When completed
Visits and Talks from local/nearest CoS group members		
Participation in local CoS or similar Refugee Support Group activities		
Provide opportunities to learn about asylum to staff via (for example) movies, meetings, and readings/handouts		
Attendance at local Refugee Week Events		
Sign up for on-line teaching modules		
Share and distribute articles about asylum, sanctuary seeking and migration to shop team		
Additional Ideas provided by the Shop		

PROCESS: EMBED

Criteria: Shop management includes sanctuary issues in its regular operations

Shops need to demonstrate that they have completed two of the following activities to meet the overall EMBED criteria.

	Evidence	When completed
Include information about sanctuary seekers in all training materials for volunteers and staff		
Identify and share ways for shop staff team to integrate welcome		
Identify a person in the shop team responsible for keeping up to date on asylum and sanctuary issues		
Commit to including trainings/updates on sanctuary issues at regular intervals in meetings/training (six-monthly/annual basis)		
Support a refugee or asylum seeker to volunteer in the shop		
Develop a tailored induction & training period for sanctuary seekers, based on their needs (level of English & understanding of UK customs)		
Put up display information in store to help direct people seeking sanctuary to local services		
If there are sanctuary seekers working in a shop, find ways to celebrate their own language, culture, and background		
Find ways to show and celebrate diversity and inclusion in the workspace, this may be volunteer-area only posters, welcoming efforts		
Additional Ideas provided by the Shop		

PROCESS: SHARE

Criteria: A shop’s welcoming activities are shared via in-store displays, signage or on social media

Shops need to demonstrate that they have completed two of the following activities to meet the overall SHARE criteria.

	Evidence	When completed
Share shop’s experience with sanctuary issues on website/social media sites [3]		
Put up information about sanctuary seekers on in-shop display boards		
Tell your local media outlet about your Shop of Sanctuary achievement and what it means		
Hang a copy of the signed CoS Pledge of Support in the shop		
Plan and hold a launch event to celebrate Refugee Week or being recognised as a Shop of Sanctuary		
Co-host an event with your local/nearest CoS group		
Display the City of Sanctuary volunteering poster in your shop inviting sanctuary seekers to volunteer in your shop		
Create a leaflet or newsletter which tells your customers about your award, what it means and even how they could get involved		
Encourage other shops, of all kinds, to seek Shop of Sanctuary status		

CASE STUDY

Oxfam Charity Shop - Castle Street Swansea

Shop Manager Philip Broadhurst shares what becoming a Shop of Sanctuary has meant to his community:

Asylum Seekers and Refugees have made up a substantial part of the shop team at Oxfam in Castle Street, Swansea since around 2004, when we built up links with Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group, a group set up by local people to help provide a welcome to new asylum seekers coming to Swansea. With asylum seekers unable to work, it suited both them and us to develop a connection which has since provided Oxfam with a steady stream of volunteers. Asylum Seekers welcome the opportunity to do something worthwhile with their time, to improve their English, to make new friends, to learn new skills and to get a UK-based work placement on their CV. Our shop team welcomes the opportunity to fill the rota! And to make new friendships with people from all around the world.

The fact that we are known as a Shop Of Sanctuary with a diverse volunteer team has definitely helped us recruit and maintain more volunteers, obviously from the asylum seeking community, but also from across the city's population. It has also helped us make a wide range of connections with groups and individuals across Swansea, winning us much goodwill... and subsequent donations!



When Swansea City Of Sanctuary began their system of Sanctuary Awards in 2014, we immediately applied for Shop Of Sanctuary status, which we gained, and then renewed in 2017. We had long been operating in a "Shop Of Sanctuary" way, but it was nice to get official status, and to use the award presentations as a way of highlighting how our shop is putting Oxfam's principles into practice at shopfloor level, and to celebrate the strength and values of our Shop Team.



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For more information please go to:

<https://shops.cityofsanctuary.org> or contact us at info@cityofsanctuary.org

