

CELEBRATING SANCTUARY



City of Sanctuary UK



**City of Sanctuary UK invites groups,
sanctuary streams and wider networks to share and
celebrate positive stories of welcome from their
communities and to invite key local influencers to attend.**

Sanctuary in Parliament:

How do we meet its aims in 2021?

Celebrating Sanctuary 2021 at a local or regional level replaces our highly successful annual Sanctuary in Parliament event. We have had to take a two-year break, as we were unable to hold this event in 2019 due to the General Election and in 2020 because of the pandemic.

Sanctuary in Parliament aims to bring our stories of welcome and the concerns of people seeking sanctuary to Westminster and to the attention of MPs and Peers.

It continues to be important for us to influence decision makers, especially with the publication of the Nationality and Borders Bill which undermines the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and discriminates against people arriving via irregular routes to claim asylum. We are conscious that that with an eighty seat majority, our influence on the government may be limited, which increases the sense of urgency about engaging with MPs.



We encourage local groups to hold an online event which includes local decision makers.

We believe that this model has the potential to be even more powerful than Sanctuary in Parliament for the following reasons:

- engaging MPs and councillors directly with their constituents
- providing opportunities for people seeking sanctuary to share their positive contributions
- enabling the public and local supporting organisations to show visible solidarity, making a public declaration of support for the vision of welcome to counteract the negative rhetoric that is prevalent in the media
- helping groups to build a positive relationship with key influencers and decision makers and maintaining an ongoing positive dialogue.

Purpose of this Guide

This Celebrating Sanctuary guide has been developed to support City of Sanctuary groups to hold Celebrating Sanctuary events, throughout 2021 and beyond.

This guide can serve as a template for similar public meetings in the future, as we know from experience that in keeping with our **Theory of Change**, meetings including people seeking sanctuary and local people in the community, passionate about welcoming them, builds empathy and solidarity and can affect change. Evidence of widespread public support for sanctuary positively influences decision makers.

We hope that this model of celebrating welcome will become a regular event in the annual calendars of City of Sanctuary groups and supporting organisations.

THEORY OF CHANGE - Social Contact → Movement Building

We maintain that in order to achieve our vision, and realise the change needed to make the UK more welcoming, we must contribute to building the movement through encouraging and inspiring the involvement of more people in promoting welcome.

Micro level - Social Contact Theory

- How we create change at a local or regional level

WHO:

CoS UK through providing support for the network and the network itself:-

1. CoS groups (and then their local network of pledged supporters - both individuals and organisations)
2. Streams of Sanctuary e.g. schools, universities

Macro level - Movement Building

- How we create change at a UK level

WHO:

CoS UK working with:-

1. CoS groups
2. Streams (see separate strategy for details)
3. Partnerships including mass membership organisations
4. Refugee Sector partnerships/coalition campaigns

HOW: Through the practical application of our network principles*

Turning empathy into action i.e. relationships of solidarity

Connecting people through welcoming activities and streams of sanctuary. This encourages friendships, changes attitudes and motivates action for positive change.

Social Contact

Involving people in campaigning and advocacy

Movement building by engaging the mainstream through streams activities and **Sanctuary Awards** and mobilising the network behind campaigning and advocacy initiatives.

Micro level examples



Mrs Y (a destitute asylum seeker) meets Mrs B at a knitting club (a welcoming activity). As Mrs B learns from Mrs Y about her journey and unmet need for protection she becomes inspired to get involved in campaigning activities.

A teacher/librarian/nurse (streams work) meets Abdul at an awareness session and learns more about the asylum system, and is motivated to stand in solidarity for a humane asylum process.

Mr A who fled persecution befriends Mr B. at a local community centre. When Mr A is refused asylum and detained, Mr B is so outraged, that he writes to his MP.

Macro level examples

In 2015, after much public pressure, the UK Government agreed to implement a resettlement programme for Syrian refugees allowing 20,000 to be located in the UK by 2020. The Syrian situation also led to a large grassroots response across the UK and as a result of this 'revolution of generosity' our network has grown considerably.

The public response to the Windrush scandal forced the government to re-examine its Home Office policies and procedures.



City of Sanctuary

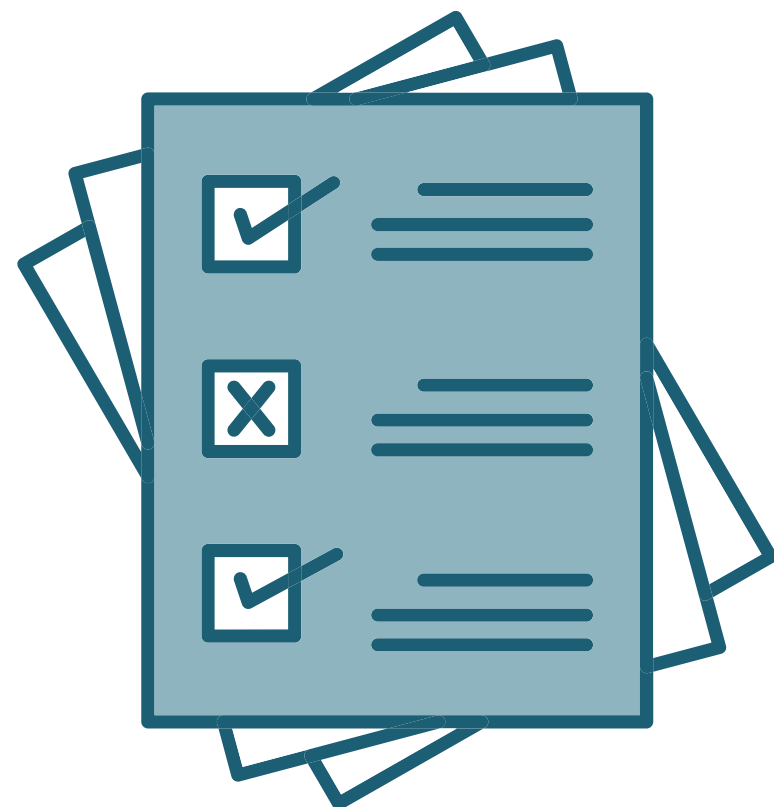
Why should we celebrate sanctuary? Why now?

We want decision makers to be aware of the broad-based alliances and support that exists for people seeking sanctuary.

We see 'Celebrating Sanctuary' public events complementing Refugee Week events in June, promoting the 70th Anniversary of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in July 2021. Moreover, a Celebrating Sanctuary event can serve as a vehicle to build rapport with decision makers in order to influence their position on changes to the asylum process. We hope that some in person celebrations will be possible later in the year. For further information on the background to the idea, see this article on the website [here](#).

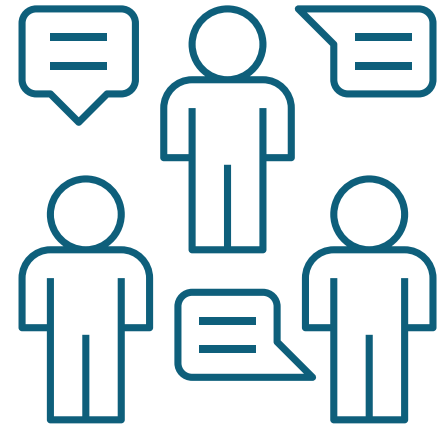
As ever, in keeping with our network principles, people seeking sanctuary should be included as speakers and their contributions recognised, and actively involved in planning and decision making.

This document provides suggestions for developing a **Celebrating Sanctuary** event. For some groups, it may be preferable to start with a meeting with their MP and not include the wider public or other local officials. Each group will need to reflect on what will work best in their context and with their local decision makers. This guide details the following steps:



- **Setting up a planning group**
- **Asking questions to guide your event-planning**
- **Agreeing key messages for your event**
- **Booking speakers and deciding on your timings**
- **Inviting local decision makers**
- **Publicising your event**
- **Engaging with the local media**
- **What to do after your event**

Set up a planning group



Start by setting up a planning group and aim to ensure people with lived experience participate. Their thoughts and suggestions are important to ensure that local leaders truly understand the impact of seeking sanctuary. This also reflects our network principle to **'engage people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels and in all activities'** and helps ensure a successful event. If you need support reaching out to and engaging people seeking sanctuary, your Regional Coordinator may be able to offer support. With the group, consider recent achievements and decide which ones deserve celebration and sharing with the community.

Ask questions to guide your event-planning

- What was the group involved with before lockdown?
- What has the group done since the pandemic started?
- What other organisations in your area are involved in welcome?
- Which organisations or institutions have received a Sanctuary Award or are engaging with your vision, and are there any upcoming Sanctuary Awards to present and celebrate??
- Which supporters could you invite to speak who might be key influencers? e.g. head teacher, religious leaders
- Which stories might you tell that reflect welcome / friendship and solidarity / partnership/ the contribution of people seeking sanctuary?
- How might you demonstrate the benefits of having people seeking sanctuary living within your community?



Agree on key messages for your event

The key messages CoS UK suggests conveying are:

- **There is broad public support for offering sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.** City of Sanctuary groups and mainstream institutions such as Schools of Sanctuary, Universities of Sanctuary is testimony to the fact that people across the UK support welcome. Try to get a speaker from one of more sanctuary awarded organisations to talk about their activities.
- **The UK has a proud tradition of providing protection** to people fleeing war, persecution and human rights abuses and we want decision makers across the UK to uphold this tradition.
- **People seeking sanctuary make a huge contribution to the communities in which they live,** we recognise and celebrate those contributions. Try to get at least two different people to convey what they have been doing in their communities whilst waiting for leave to remain and the opportunity to work.
- **A fair, safe and effective asylum system** giving people the right to work and support for integration will have huge economic savings as well as build cohesive communities.

A positive narrative building positive attitudes towards people seeking sanctuary is also part of the wider movement's efforts in the longer term to bring about change to the asylum system.

Book speakers and decide on your timings

Once you have agreed the stories you wish to tell, you will need to book the speakers and decide the timings for the event.

A Zoom meeting should ideally be no more than an hour and a half to ensure commitment from attendees to sign up and stay until the end.

The meeting can be interspersed with a video and/or photos if you have them. A good format would be a panel of speakers with a Q&A at the end.

Invite local decision makers

Your local MPs have a responsibility to represent you in Parliament. They have an obligation to listen to their constituents' concerns and they will be interested in your activities which build community cohesion and engage people in their constituencies. Even MPs who have traditionally supported the hostile environment can be moved to hear human interest stories and want to know about positive examples from their constituencies. Other key community influencers can also be invited such as The Bishop, Rabbi and /or Iman, Headteachers of Sanctuary Schools, Vice Chancellor of the University etc.

Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary have been building a relationship with their MP Stuart Anderson, including inviting him to meet the women seeking sanctuary who shared an allotment. Stuart had a shared interest in growing plants. He then mentioned some of the welcoming work of the Wolverhampton group in the House of Commons and encouraged Chris Philp (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office) to visit Wolverhampton to meet the group. Stuart, a Conservative MP, has also now publicly supported the #LiftTheBan campaign.



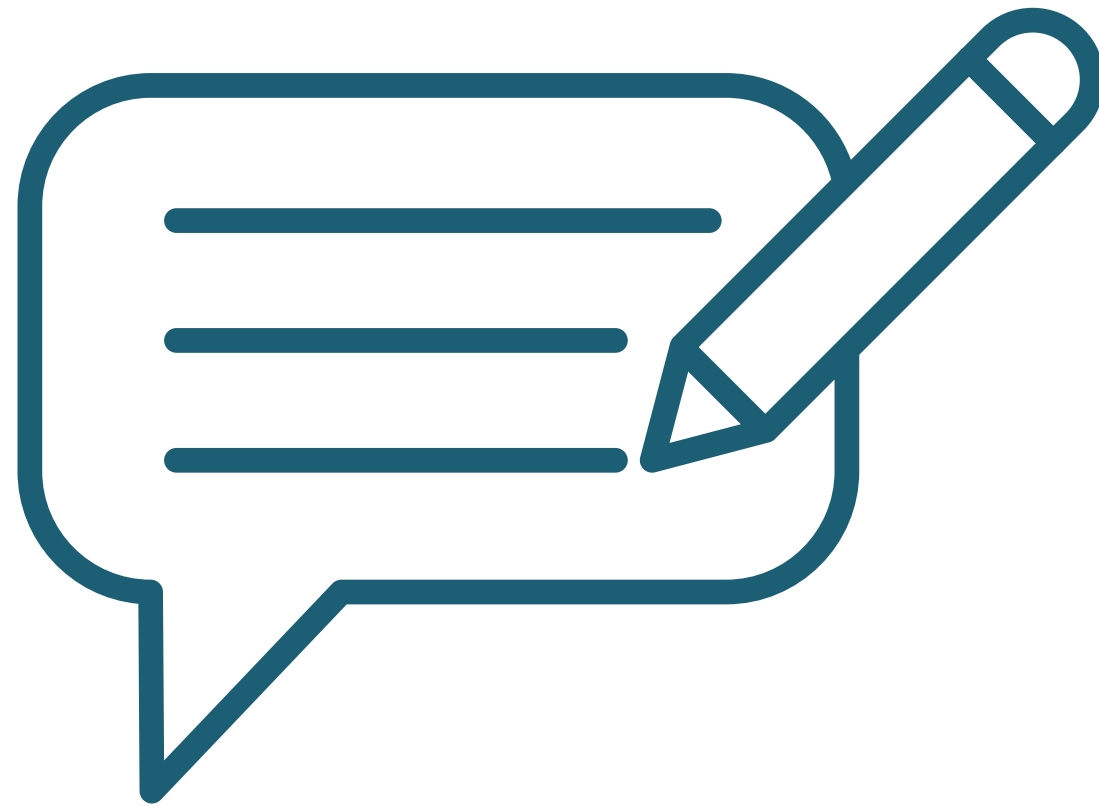
Contacting your MP

You can find out who your MP is and how to access their website by going to: <https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>. Here you can find their contact details, including their email address.

Contacting your local councillor

Your local councillor represents you in your local authority. Ideally you would invite councillors with responsibility for the key areas that impact - and ensure cross party invitations, but you can also ask all supporters to invite their ward councillors to the meeting. You can identify and find the contact details for your local councillors at <https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors>.

What to include in the invitation letter



The invitation letter to MPs and Councillors can include the following:

- **your group activities**
- **how long your group has been going**
- **how many volunteers and people seeking sanctuary are involved**
- **your vision for your city**
- **the other organisations involved in your network**
- **a link to your website and/or social media**
- **clear details of the event (date, time, registration process and programme)**

Researching the MP

If you're contacting your MP for the first time, you can do some research about your MP, including their party's position and whether they have said anything relevant on asylum or refugee issues. You can do this by looking at their voting record, questions they've asked, or just their social media feed.

If for example you find out that your MP is interested in a particular sport or hobby, you might have a person seeking sanctuary talking about that sport. If the MP is a parent then introducing them to a parent seeking asylum helps them to connect. Have a look at the Wolverhampton case study for a successful instance of this approach.

Publicise your meeting

Send an invitation to everyone on your mailing list and ask them to promote it amongst their networks. Provide information about planned events on your website and on your social media feed.



Engage local media

Publicising your **Celebrating Sanctuary** event in your local media is a great way to bring the message of welcome to a wider audience, build support for the vision of sanctuary and influence local decision-makers. You can do this by writing a press release about the meeting with a strong human focus to try and give the issue some publicity:

- **Find the human angle.** This could be a story of friendship, or a story of a person seeking sanctuary making a contribution to their local community.
- **Ensure the press release is clear and eye-catching.** This includes simple things, such as ensuring the news angle has a punchy headline and introduction of the issue, and answers the following questions: who, what, when, where, and how?
- **If you have an acceptance from key influencers ensure this is in the press release.** So the headline might be “Local MP and councillors to meet people seeking sanctuary.”
- **Include a good quality picture.** This could be of a welcoming activity.
- **You can send this Press Release to the local newspaper and the local radio station.** The ideal is to send directly to the community journalist whom you will already know. Talk to the City of Sanctuary Communications Manager (colleen@cityfosanctury.org) for advice.

Making online and social media content

To promote your event to local people you can also use your website and social media. People seeking sanctuary and volunteers could share their testimonies and experiences in blogs, videos and podcasts on the website. These could then be shared via social media, or you can post just short tasters of the stories you will be sharing at the event with photos.

After the event

It is always helpful to publicise your meeting on social media, and ideally using photos if everyone is comfortable with this. At the moment this may just be a photo of a Zoom screen but it could be from the past about something you celebrated. Equally, it is valuable to follow up with MPs or Councillors by email after the meeting to thank them for coming and to say that you look forward to meeting them in person or inviting them to a welcome activity when the pandemic is over.

Please put the story of the meeting onto your website and send the link to your Regional Coordinator or the Communications Manager.

Take a look at our *Brief Guide to Communications* leaflet for some tips on quick and easy storytelling.

Brief Guide to Communications



City of Sanctuary

Share

- Don't be shy to share your stories – this will help **build the movement**
- **Make the most of Slack to communicate across the network**

Our Key Messages

- Our vision is for people seeking sanctuary to feel **safe** and **welcome** across all spaces and spheres of society
- We build relationships of **friendship** and **solidarity** between local people and people seeking sanctuary
- We work to empower **people seeking sanctuary** to be leaders in the movement

A good story will reflect

- Our **theory of change** – social contact breaks down fear, prejudice and barriers
- Our **values** especially inclusion and participation
- **Network principles** Including partnership work and the contribution of people seeking sanctuary

We have unique stories of welcome
Look out for opportunities to tell them!

Use the Communications Manager

- Talk to the Communications Manager for help with messaging and media opportunities
- Send your stories or ideas to the Communications Manager – this includes website and social media posts
- Send local press, radio or TV coverage to the Communications Manager
colleen@cityofsanctuary.org

Quick and easy story telling

- If all our volunteers involved in welcoming activities offered either a quote or a photo it takes minutes to put the story into context and get it on the website and social media
- **Work together** with people seeking sanctuary to raise their voice and ensure it's heard.
- Be **sensitive** to the needs of people seeking sanctuary, remember confidentiality and always get permission for photographs
- **Photos** can be anonymised – take pictures from behind, of hands, of banners, of the activity itself

Keep Telling Stories – Keep Sharing

We hope the guidance in this document was useful for you.

The above are some suggestions to encourage you to develop an event reflective of the way your group offers welcome. We would love to hear you ideas on developing events and share how you may be celebrating sanctuary in your community.

Remember your Regional Coordinator and the Communications Manager will support your efforts wherever they can. [Click here for list of staff contacts.](#)

Advocacy in addition to Celebrating Sanctuary

CoS Sanctuary supporters and people seeking sanctuary will have concerns re: the Nationality and Borders Bill which reflects the hostile environment and threatens the very right to claim asylum. Celebrating Sanctuary events and following meetings with MPs can be used to raise these concerns. See our **Borders Bill website** for more information. It includes a good case study from the North East which engaged local MPs, councillors and a Bishop. A good relationship with your MP who knows you have widespread public support, is key to influencing their vote on key amendments and the bill itself.

