

## THE DROP-IN

Thanks to the generosity of the Catholic friars we were able last July to move the weekly drop-in to the Holy Cross Centre on Wellington Street. We have a big room (there are more of us these days) and good kitchen facilities. The drop-in offers a meal prepared and served by our brilliant volunteers and an opportunity to meet others. We have always seen the main function of the drop-in as being social.

There is no such thing as typical drop-in but yesterday's (April 20) gives a flavour of what goes on:

- 107 people attended
- 8 newcomers were welcomed by our team of Open Door volunteers
- An animation workshop upstairs attracted 17 people
- We recruited people for a dance workshop at Curve and a canal boat trip offered by Rotary
- We gave out 3 pushchairs, all donated
- Someone from the Race Equality Centre came to administer a health survey
- 6 people were signed up for an 'Antiquities at Risk' event at New Walk Museum
- 33 people took part in a skills audit which will help us to choose future activities

Among recent visitors to the drop-in: the High Sheriff of Leicestershire, a representative from Rugby Quakers, local Catholics, Muslim organisations, the NHS, Embrace Arts, a potential host from Lincolnshire, reporters from BBC, ITV and Sky and people who have popped in and given us various donations.

## ADMIN IMPROVEMENTS

We are moving towards a fully integrated online administrative system. This includes:

- A Google Not For Profit Organisational Account
- Creating gmail accounts for our volunteers
- An online volunteering process
- Improvements to our website

## NEST

We were able to recruit 29 new volunteers to our team of NEST caseworkers last year, enabling us to deal with almost 30 new fresh claim cases. Thanks to a meeting called by Refugee Action a regular skype meeting of caseworkers on similar schemes across the country has been set up. This year we have begun to move to a fully electronic document system which will streamline the admin process and make it easier to monitor cases.

LCOS is registering with the Office of Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) to offer accreditation to our caseworkers when they provide clients with legal advice.

Training, which has included volunteers from Pride Without Borders, has already begun.

## ENGLISH CLASSES

- There have been changes in our ESOL provision since Christmas, with Leicester University offering some much needed space, and a big increase in the number of volunteers coming forward.
- We have at least three groups running on Monday and Tuesday nights. More advanced classes run on Thursday. Numbers are high.
- Our volunteers have a range of skills and experience – some are new to teaching, others have teaching experience but are new to language teaching, others are new to our students. What they all share is commitment to the job.
- We are extremely grateful to Leicester University who have provided use of their classrooms, access to free printing, training, initial assessments and a Christmas social.

## ALSO...

Last December LCOS was involved with the City Council in welcoming the first Syrian refugees to arrive in Leicester under the government's Resettlement Scheme.

The Journeys Festival, which included music, art, photography and coffee shop conversations, involved several of our members. A similar event is being organised for 2016.

BBC Radio Leicester, BBC East Midlands, ITV and SKY have all either visited us or asked for interviews over the last 12 months.

A coachload of our members went on a wet and windy seaside trip to Hunstanton in September and claim to have enjoyed every minute of it.

The Bike Scheme has distributed 162 refurbished bikes since it started. An evaluation is taking place and fresh funds are being sought to continue the scheme.

Appealing4 continues to produce almost everything we ask for even if some items take a little more time.

A comedy show in January raised over £500 for LCOS.

## THANK YOU

A big thank you goes to our many donors who this year include the Order of the Companions of Malta, Leicester Quakers, Birstall and Wanlip Churches, Unite, Leicester Human Rights Network, Rothley Parish Church, Churches Together Barrow and numerous individuals, anonymous and otherwise.

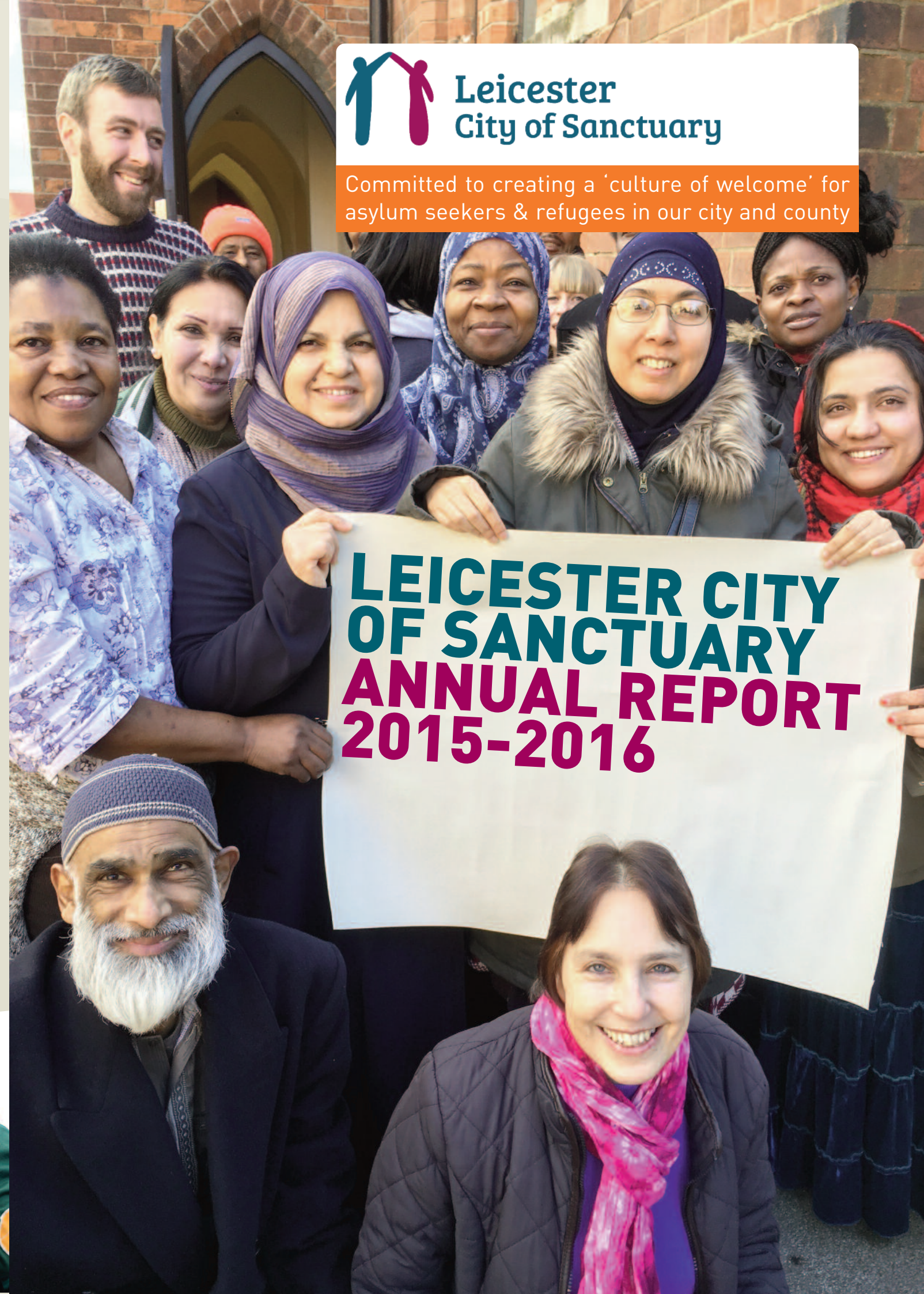
The Muslim community continues to provide items of food to coincide with their religious festivals.

We are a volunteer based organisation and I would like to thank everyone who has helped out this year in whatever capacity. This includes many of our members who are keen to show willing and give something back.



**Leicester  
City of Sanctuary**

Committed to creating a 'culture of welcome' for asylum seekers & refugees in our city and county





# LEICESTER CITY OF SANCTUARY ANNUAL REPORT 2015-2016

The main part of this Report will tell you what Leicester City of Sanctuary (LCOS) has been up to in the past year. This is the less exciting but equally vital part that tells you something of what goes on behind the scenes in order to make that happen.

LCOS is a charity. It is run day-to-day by its a Steering Group and co-ordinators, but behind that are its charity trustees, the body which is legally accountable to the public at large for all that we do. At our last AGM on 9th May 2015 the following six people were elected to that body: Rob Blow, Rev Peter Hobson, Pam Inder, Sam Javid, Annie Merton, Golden Ngwenya. This represented an almost total change-over from the former trustee body. At its first meeting Revd Pete Hobson was elected as chair of trustees, and Annie Merton as vice-chair. The trustee body has met four times in the past year, on 4 June, 23 September, 3 December and 2 March 2016.

Our main concern has been placing the Charity on a firmer footing, in two ways. The first of these has been seeking to respond to the decision of the 2015 AGM to revise the constitution to allow us to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), and a proposed new constitution to do that is being brought to this year's AGM. This will make the trustees at any time collectively liable for the organisation, rather than individually so, and will also make it much easier for us to employ people if we wish to do so.

The other concern has been to ensure that our financial processes and management are fit for purpose at a time when LCOS is beginning to receive more significant financial grants to develop its work. In addition Mick Walker, as lead Coordinator, reports to us at each meeting, and also now meets regularly with Annie, our vice-chair, in between meetings to ensure he receives appropriate support from the Trustees. We have also begun work developing a more suitable Strategic Plan for the future, and expect to continue working on that, together with members of the Steering Group.

The proposed new constitution recommends that the current Trustees remain in office for the next 12 months, to be joined by a Treasurer, to be appointed. This will offer continuity at a time of change. After that Trustees will normally serve for three years, with one-third retiring at a time.

**Pete Hobson • Chair of Trustees 2015-16**



## CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

### EUROPE'S GREATEST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS'

I'm beginning this Annual Report on the day Pope Francis visits the Greek island of Lesbos. At last after endless negotiations in plush EU offices in Brussels a world leader is seeing the refugee crisis at first hand. His visit will help to expose the plight of thousands detained in Greece since Europe's less than satisfactory deal with Turkey to stem the flow of migrants and refugees. Already cracks are beginning to appear in the agreement. Turkey stands accused of shoving Syrian refugees back over the border and the financial arrangements are hanging in the balance. Meanwhile, a growing number of refugees are risking the dangerous sea crossing from Libya and more people are drowning in the Mediterranean. The refugee crisis shows no sign of abating.

### A TALE OF TWO NARRATIVES

It seems to have taken a photograph of a drowned three year old on a Mediterranean beach to provoke a change in many people's perception of the refugee crisis as it developed last summer. Up to that point the dominant narrative, and one which still seems to be the automatic response of most of our politicians and much of our media, described migrants in terms of a wandering mass of faceless people, a horde threatening the security of Europe's borders. Our government's response exemplified this view perfectly and in many ways still does. Migrants should stay put in the camps and take advantage of our generous aid package. They should not come here.

The other narrative, and one which refuses to lie down in the face of negativity, sees Britain as having a moral obligation to do more in the face of thousands of desperate people seeking a place of safety and a new life. Angela Merkel seemed to agree. Unusually the media offered us the opportunity to hear from the migrants themselves. Across this country there was a largely spontaneous outpouring of concern which has not gone away. People want to help in any way they can and they want our government to fulfil its responsibilities. Cameron was forced to allow space in this country for 20,000 Syrian refugees, still a woeful response in the eyes of many.

### A DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT

Last September, at the very peak of the crisis, we organised a public meeting in Leicester Cathedral. Over 250 people attended, way more than we expected, and many different organisations were represented. The momentum generated at that time has not gone away. We have had many more contacts from organisations and individuals and more support has come our way in the form of donations and support in kind. Our inboxes are full of e-mails.

In Leicester and the surrounding area more people became aware of the fact that there are over a thousand asylum seekers living in our community. New people are arriving every week and Leicester City of Sanctuary is for many the first port of call. Since we started the drop-in in 2011 we have seen people from 70 nationalities and we are busier than ever. We see the result of real destitution and poor mental health every week. We also meet people who have so much to offer and who are desperate to do things for themselves and for others. When it comes to human resilience asylum seekers have much to teach us all.



### JOINT FUNDING WITH THE RED CROSS

Last year Red Cross and LCOS submitted a successful joint application for Lottery funding. LCOS will be receiving £50,000 spread over the next five years, most of which will sustain our core activities (the drop-in, English classes and the NEST scheme). This illustrates something important. By operating alongside a number of other organisations such as the Red Cross we try not to duplicate services or attempt to do everything. We know what we are good at and we know what we have the capacity to do.

### BIG LOTTERY/BIG MONEY

This must count as the highlight of the year. We certainly gave out the biggest cheer when ITV told us that we had won £50,000. It's remarkable to think that we almost pulled out of the People's Projects because we doubted that an application from a refugee charity would ever get the votes of the public when set against other good causes on mainstream ITV. Some thought it could even backfire on us. Instead, after a magnificently organised campaign spearheaded by Shali Bullough and Mark Pollishook, we ended up bagging the top prize. Our members were fully involved – one collected hundreds of votes by calling in at local churches – and we received a huge amount of support from individuals and organisations, many not involved with us before and many not even local. Of the 95 successful bids across the regions of Britain we were number 18 in terms of votes. Not bad.

So how far have we got in terms of implementing our chosen project, 'Stepping Stones'?

The money is going to enable us to set up a number of activities which will give asylum seekers an opportunity to take active roles – organizing as well as participating. These so far include a football team, an Arabic class, a schools arts project, an outdoor pursuits school trip, an allotment project, knitting, crafts, eyebrow threading, table tennis, leave to remain advice, and asylum seeker self-organised trips. We will be able to pay volunteers to do the admin and co-ordination. It's a huge step forward for LCOS.

One thing: we have to spend it in 12 months.

One product of the campaign is that we're now getting hundreds of views per day on Facebook. We've learnt a trick about how to exploit social media.

**A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL  
THOSE WHO SUPPORTED US  
DURING THE CAMPAIGN.**

