



Leicester  
City of Sanctuary

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



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

# LEICESTER CITY OF SANCTUARY

## CHAIR'S REPORT

**Strategic Plan 2022-25** – Our last strategic plan covered the period 2019-2022 and during the past year we have reviewed its impact and produced a new plan covering the next three years. Many thanks to all who engaged with the process – members, volunteers, staff, partners – and not least the service users themselves. We'll be presenting this at the AGM, and it's available to see on our website. In summary it reaffirms our vision and mission statements and proposes, building on the previous three years' growth, with continued careful expansion of our services within a renewed six strategic aims.

**Events and Priorities** – On a global scale, events continue to move with mass refugee crises from Afghanistan last August, and Ukraine since February. We have been supportive of others working to welcome people from those countries into our city, as they arrive, at least, having formal refugee status from day one – but our main priority remains working with those continuing to arrive in Leicester, whose claims for asylum are yet to be assessed, and who are forced to live on the margins of society, whilst that is the case, often for long periods of time.

**Changes to the Team** – Shali Bullough has been our paid coordinator since summer 2017, working notionally a 0.8 week – in practice usually much more. Late last year she indicated a need to have more time for family and other needs, and so the review of strategic plan went hand in hand with a review of staffing structure. This began on 1 August when we welcomed Caroline Hickey as our new Operations Lead (0.8), working alongside Shali as Strategic Lead (0.4). Together with them, we now have two project worker posts – keeping Anna Goodman (0.4) but sadly bidding farewell to Chloe Woods, who left us on 31 August to pursue an alternative career in clinical psychology. Alex Jakeman continues as finance and admin officer. I cannot speak too highly of this whole team who enable us to deliver a high standard of support and care to many asylum seekers and refugees. I also thank our incredible volunteers who run so many of our day-to-day activities.

**Continuing Trustees** – For the past year have been Pete Hobson (chair), Jenny Dnes (vice-chair), Hagar Al-Katheri, Sadiq Ahamed, Cllr Danny Myers and Eric Nkundumubano. Jenny and Eric will be stepping down as trustees, after serving since 2017 and 2018 respectively. We owe them great thanks. This April four new trustees joined us by co-option, following a careful process of advertising and interview – all of whom will need confirming in office at this AGM. They are Sarah Jones, Annabel Mwagalanyi, Anne Senior and Noel Singh.

**Financial Overview** – the full financial report for the year ending 31 March 2022 will be presented to the AGM. In the event we nearly broke even on the year, with a deficit of just over £1,000 on a turn-over of £80.4k. This was a real improvement on a budgeted £33k deficit, due largely to greatly increased income – with donations up 47% to £29.3k and additional grants of £13.8k beyond what was budgeted for. This meant we entered this financial year 2022-23 with assets of £68.4k. Our strategic reserves policy sets £33k of that aside, still leaving a cushion of over £35k. This is all to the good, as we are now in the third year of our 4 year lottery grant, and so need to continue to attend to financial stability, if we are to maintain the level of our work past the time it ends in May 2024. This year we budget to spend just under £100k. We are aiming to double our regular standing order giving from supporters to £10k whilst matching last year's 'other donation' income of £25k. Taken along with expected grant income of £49k that comes to £84k – with £16k to be drawn from reserves. I hope all who read this will consider playing your own part in all of this – most especially by considering becoming a regular donor.

**Pete Hobson – Chair 2021-22**



# LEICESTER CITY OF SANCTUARY

## COORDINATOR'S REPORT

Over the past year we've focused on building back better in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, adapting to the ever-changing landscape, whilst also dealing with the consequences of the Home Office Hostile Environment policy, which aims to make life unbearably difficult for those who cannot show the right paperwork. Cited as one of the harshest immigration policies in the history of the United Kingdom, it has been widely criticised as inhumane, ineffective, and unlawful.



### HUB

A recent change in Leicester has been an increase in the use of local hotels as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers, including families housed in single rooms. Most service users at our hub are now living in hotels. Stuck in a small room from morning till night, we see widespread depression, made worse as people often struggle to access basic essentials, such as nutritious food, clothing, medicine, mobile phones and data. Although hotel accommodation is supposed to be temporary, many of those accessing our services have been there for over six months or more.

As well as providing a warm welcome, with opportunities to learn, relax and socialise, we've also developed a new caseworker post to support people with their individual needs and signpost them to other services within the city.

### ENGLISH AND ORIENTATION

Many people arrive with very limited English, but have a huge drive to learn. New arrivals are not eligible for college for six months, so we've developed an orientation programme for them, which includes weekly conversational English classes, combined with lifeskills and local trips. A huge thanks to volunteers Carol, Phil, Mary, Tess and John, who lead the conversation classes at our hub and make them so much fun.

For those with a higher level of English, the ESOL classes, via our partnership with UoL, provide a range of options, including advanced courses preparing for the internationally recognised IELTS qualification. Students who have a sufficiently high level of English also have the opportunity to take part in preessional courses at the University. We're very grateful for our partnership with Leicester University, which gives people so many more options, and to volunteer ESOL group leader Julie Umarova, who coordinates this for us.

Alongside helping people to learn English, our orientation programme includes a visit to Leicester Central Library, local charity shops and Leicester market, with a small amount of spending money to help them learn how to survive on the very limited NASS support. Leicester College comes to the hub regularly to sign people up to follow-on English classes, once they are eligible, alongside TREC, who advise on next steps after getting Leave to remain. We also invite partner organisations to talk about other relevant services in the city, including access to health screening programmes and mental health support.



### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

The lifting of all restrictions has allowed us to reintroduce many more social events and to recreate the buzz that has traditionally surrounded the hub. We've enjoyed all sorts of creative activities, such as jewellery making, wreath making and planting. Rocksteady Music School treated us to a music day, bringing drum kits, keyboards and guitars along to our hub, and we had an unbelievable amount of fun showcasing our musical talents to the sounds of Bob Marley. There was more music during our party to celebrate Refugee Week, when musicians Phil, Annabelle and Ruth serenaded us with Beatles songs, which we enthusiastically sang along to. To add to the celebration, Mirch Masala Restaurant sent us a free feast which was absolutely delicious.

### FAMILIES WORK

Maggie Edgington, our volunteer families lead, runs a parents and toddlers play session at our hub during term-time for children who are too young for a nursery place. This year we've also developed a partnership with Leicester College who have provided holiday cooking sessions for the families in our playgroup. During the school holidays Maggie organises outings to Abbey Park, allowing the families to socialise together, share food and enjoy the fresh air. The park trips are hugely popular, with between 25-40 people joining in each week, and are particularly beneficial for the families living in local hotels, giving the children the space to run around and play freely with others away from their cramped hotel room.

### TRIPS

Highlights have included a boat trip on the Leicestershire waterways thanks to Novus Rotary Club; an afternoon in Sheffield at the Women's Euros 22 to watch a group stage match between Switzerland and the Netherlands; a trip to the Gorse Hill City Farm for the toddler group; and a visit to the Central Firestation.



## FOOTBALL, SEWING AND NEST

Football remains hugely popular, and to cater for the high demand we now run three pitches on Saturday mornings where up to 50 young men enjoy the weekly kickaround. Phil, our volunteer football lead, is always finding new opportunities for the group, including participation at the St Georges tournament in Uttoxeter, as part of Amnesty International's Football Welcomes event, where the LCoS team played Stoke and Everton Refugee Teams. We're very appreciative of the on-going support from LCitC who fund one of our pitches.

The sewing group, run by volunteers Mandy, Linda and Alison, is as industrious as ever. It provides a space to make new friends, learn new skills, and get lost in the joy of creativity, and is now branching into knitting, as well as dressmaking.

Led by volunteer Alan Desmond, a law lecturer at UoL, our NEST team continues to work with clients whose asylum claims have been refused. Clients in this situation are very vulnerable, with no access to Home Office support, and no recourse to public funds. Our NEST volunteers help clients understand complex Home Office/Tribunal decision letters, so that they have a clear understanding for the reasons their asylum claims have been refused. They then explore any options for finding new evidence (information not previously seen by the Home Office to support a fresh claim, for example letters from doctors/psychologists, newspaper articles, photographs, documents from the client's home country) and provide support to gather this.



## EMERGENCY FUND

We provide the money for a small emergency fund which is available to all asylum seekers in the city. This is administered by British Red Cross to allow us to reach a wider group than only those accessing our services. The fund helps people in a crisis, for example with transport costs to hospital, medicine, essential data or extra food, particularly for those who have specific dietary needs, such as food intolerance, that the hotels do not cater for.

## VACCINE CONFIDENCE WORK

We've been recognised for the work we started in 2021 encouraging vaccine take up by asylum seekers and refugees. A grant from Leicester City Council has allowed us to continue this initiative by becoming part of their city-wide Vaccination Confidence Programme. We've run sessions to dispel covid myths and brought in medical experts from Leicester University to answer people's questions and concerns around covid and the vaccine. We've organised for a mobile vaccination van to visit us three times in 2022 and have accompanied people to pop-up clinics in the town centre to help them overcome the various barriers they face. We've built a team of asylum seeker ambassadors to help us with interpreting and translating, in order to inspire trust in the vaccine with our service users. As a result, we've gained a lot of insight into the barriers to vaccination amongst asylum seekers and refugees, and have been able to share that knowledge through the Vaccination Confidence Programme at various conferences, so that the insight can be passed on to the NHS and decision-makers nationally. Over the past year we've supported more than 50 people to get their vaccination.

Shali Bullough – Coordinator 2021-22

## MOVING FORWARD – CAROLINE HICKEY, OPERATIONS LEAD

I joined Leicester City of Sanctuary at the beginning of August this year, from a background in Community development, after working within refugee communities since 1995. I recognise the huge challenges and ever more complex issues facing those seeking asylum in the UK, and the difficulties that our service users have to navigate on a daily basis.

The hostile environment means accommodation on a no choice basis, risk of detention, no right to work and scrutiny when seeking healthcare. It is illegal for irregular migrants to drive, and banks have to carry out regular immigration checks on their customers and report to the Home Office. These are examples of just some of the conditions laid out whilst waiting for a decision from the Home Office, for which there is no time frame.

From my first month's experience, I have seen the enormous need for our work at Leicester City of Sanctuary, I have seen the respect shown to us from people that use our services, external partners and other charities working locally. Delivering a weekly hub has a huge impact on the lives of people living in the city centre hotels, by connecting people, offering support, food, clothing, and local casework; these services are what people need to survive their own everyday hostile environments.

We are a place of sanctuary and I and the team look forward to establishing a stronger presence within Leicester City, whilst continuing to meet the needs of those needing our services, and honouring our mission "**to welcome asylum seekers and refugees in and around Leicester, and support them to rebuild their lives, develop their skills and feel part of the community**".

If you would like to know more about Leicester City of Sanctuary, contact us via:

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